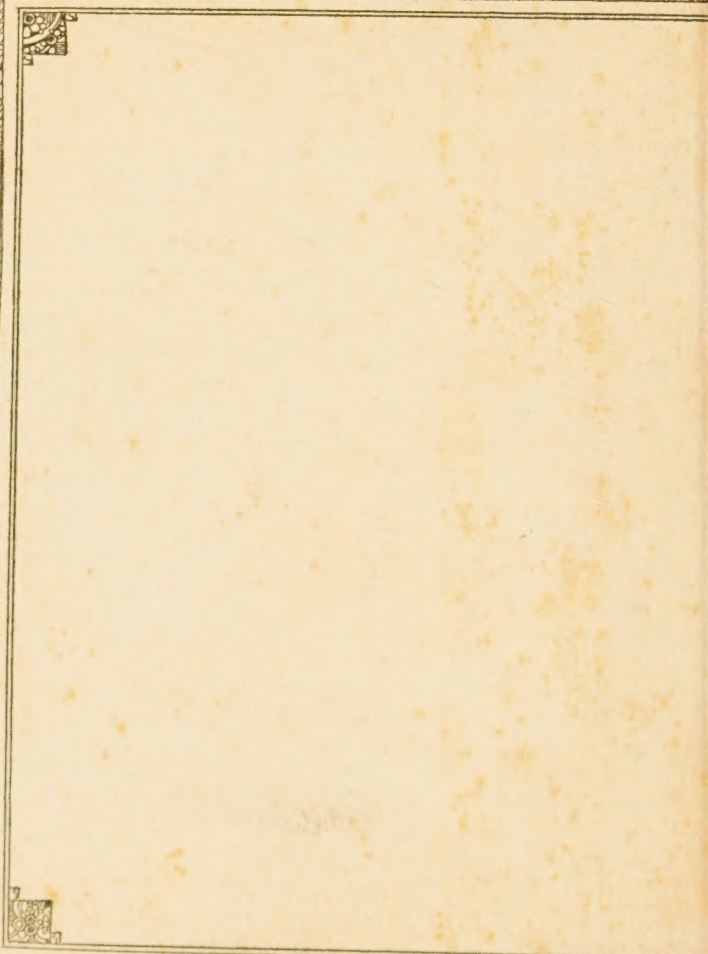


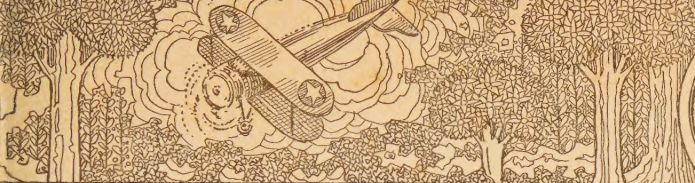
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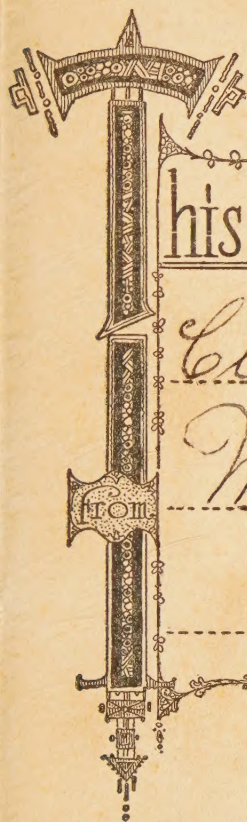


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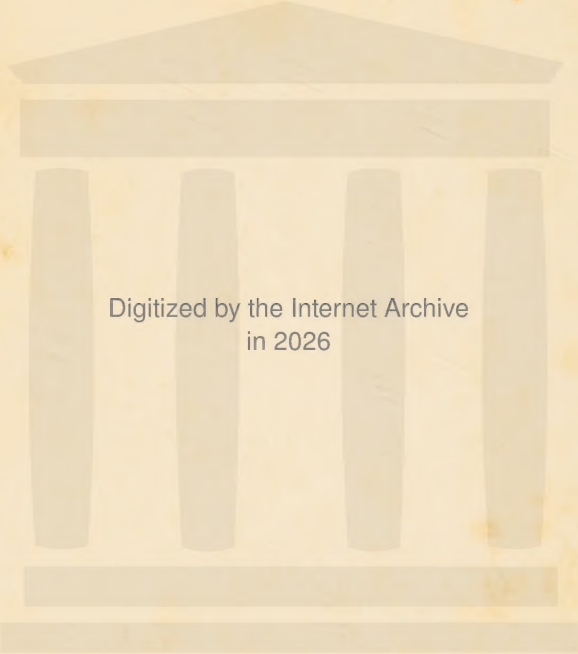
his is my Book

Claude Smith

Mother

1932





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IN THAT LAGOON WAS A SWARM OF ALLIGATORS.
"Bomba the Jungle Boy in the Swamp of Death"

BOMBA
THE JUNGLE BOY
IN THE
SWAMP OF DEATH
OR
The Sacred Alligators of Abarago

BY
ROY ROCKWOOD

**AUTHOR OF "BOMBA THE JUNGLE BOY," "UNDER THE
OCEAN TO THE SOUTH POLE," "THE CITY
BEYOND THE CLOUDS," ETC.**

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By ROY ROCKWOOD

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BOMBA THE JUNGLE BOY IN THE SWAMP OF DEATH
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BOMBA THE JUNGLE BOY IN THE SWAMP OF DEATH

CHAPTER I

ENGULFED BY THE FLOOD

A JAGGED streak of lightning shot athwart the sky, followed by a deafening crash of thunder.

The lurid glare revealed Bomba, the jungle boy, crouched in a hollow beneath the roots of an overturned tree. He had sought refuge there when caught by the storm while he was on a hunting expedition. He knew that no game would be abroad while the tempest continued. So he mastered his impatience as best he could and pushed himself back as far as possible in his temporary shelter, ever and again sending a glance aloft at the lowering skies.

But there was no sign of the storm's cessation. The flashes of lightning were almost continuous. The thunder sounded like the discharge of a thou-

sand cannon. The rain pelted down in a deluge as though it designed this time to drown the earth and could not be turned from its purpose.

Even in his present cramped and confined position, the jungle boy was a striking figure. His lithe form suggested the power and suppleness of a panther. Although but a boy in years, his muscles, rippling on arms and legs and shoulders, betokened remarkable strength. His skin was as bronzed as that of an Indian, but his hair and eyes and features betrayed his white origin. His face was finely chiseled and showed inherited breeding. His brown eyes were keen and piercing and brown wavy hair covered a splendidly developed head.

His clothing was simple, consisting of a tunic, sandals and a puma skin slung over his breast. A pouch at his belt contained arrows and a bow was held in his left hand. Thrust in his belt was a machete, a long knife with a razor edge, that had more than once saved his life in hand-to-hand combat.

The rain still continued to fall in torrents. It had already persisted for hours, an unusual thing in the Amazonian jungle where storms come up suddenly and vanish almost as quickly. Bomba became impatient. Although the sun was invisible, he knew that it was getting late in the afternoon, and he did not want to return to his cabin empty-

handed. His stock of supplies was running low and a tapir or a jaboty would come in handy.

He was not only impatient but uncomfortable. While his head and shoulders were reasonably well protected, the hollow in which he was crouching had filled with water and his legs and body were drenched.

To this discomfort was added a certain uneasiness of mind. The hollow was rapidly becoming a lake. Numberless rills flowed down the surrounding slopes and united at the bottom, and not far off was the Aloya, a river that usually ran peacefully between its banks but on occasion became a roaring torrent that swept away everything in its path.

The boy hesitated, however, to leave his covert, not that he cared for the pelting rain, but because a gale was raging, against which it was almost impossible to make head. The gale was so violent that it was uprooting trees that at any moment might crash upon any one moving beneath them. The lightning, too, found victims among the forest monarchs. Even as Bomba pondered leaving his refuge there was a blinding flash and the two parts of a great tree, split from top to bottom, fell with a thunderous crash that made the earth tremble.

So Bomba waited until the water had reached such a depth in the hollow that he had to choose

between the possibility of getting crushed and the certainty of being drowned.

He chose the former and, rising to his full height, grasped his bow and prepared to emerge from his place of refuge. At that moment he caught sight of something that made him on the instant as rigid as stone.

A monster puma, one of the fiercest animals that range the jungle, was coming toward him. The brute was evidently in a vile temper, snarling and showing its fangs as it moved along. Bomba conjectured that, like himself, the animal had sought temporary shelter and now, despairing of the storm ceasing, was on its way to its home cave.

Bomba fitted an arrow to his bow. The motion that he made in doing this, swift and noiseless as it was, caught the roving eye of the beast and rage came into the eyes as they descried the enemy. Growling horribly, it crouched for a spring.

The spring was never made. Even as Bomba drew back the string of his bow a great tawny body launched itself into the air and fell like a thunderbolt upon the crouching puma. Two terrific roars, and the battle was on.

A fight ensued that baffles description. The second puma—for such it was—seemed slightly larger than the first and had the advantage of surprise. But it was also older and, as the first

was in its prime, the struggle was waged on practically even terms.

Over and over the beasts rolled, clawing, spitting, biting, each trying to get a hold on the other's throat. They had forgotten all about the human onlooker in their fierce rage against each other. Perhaps they had old scores to pay off. It was certain that one of them would not leave the place alive.

Bomba could have slain them both while thus engaged, had he chosen. That impulse came to him but was rejected. Why waste his arrows when they were doing his work for him?

Although there was a terrible fascination in watching that epic struggle, he was hurrying away from the scene when something familiar about one of those struggling bodies gave him pause. He looked more closely.

Then from being an impartial onlooker he became an ardent partisan, for in the second comer he had recognized an old friend.

"Polulu! Polulu!" he shouted, as he danced excitedly about the fighting beasts. "Good old Polulu! He saw Bomba was in danger and came to help him. Kill him, Polulu! Kill! Kill!"

He drew his knife and circled about the pair, seeking a chance to get in a deadly thrust. But they were whirling about like a pin-wheel and his knife was as likely to strike one as the other.

As matters fared, his help was not needed. For Polulu had at last gained the throat hold that he wanted. The other slashed and tore him with its claws, but to no avail. That terrible grip held on remorselessly until a quiver ran through the body of the vanquished beast and it lay still.

Then Polulu rose and began to lick his wounds while Bomba ran to him and caressed his great head.

The huge brute purred like a cat and licked Bomba's hand.

The friendship between the two had had a curious origin. Some years before, the puma had been caught beneath a falling tree which had broken its leg. Bomba, wandering through the jungle, had come across the imprisoned beast and had been moved to pity by its plight. He brought it food and water and when the beast had had time to realize that the boy was a friend, Bomba carefully released it and bound up and set the broken leg. The puma was deeply grateful, and from that time on had the devotion for Bomba that a dog has for its master. They met frequently in the jungle and on more than one occasion Polulu, as Bomba had named him, had saved his benefactor's life.

Bomba examined Polulu's wounds and found that although painful none of them was mortal. The lad used on them some native ointment that

he carried with him and Polulu looked his gratitude.

"Brave Polulu!" commended Bomba. "In all the jungle there is none so brave as Polulu."

There was a gratified rumble from the animal's cavernous throat as though it understood the tribute.

"Bomba would like to stay with Polulu," the lad continued, "but the storm is heavy and the water is rising and Bomba must make haste."

He gave a parting pat to the shaggy head and started off. Polulu made as though to follow him, but was so exhausted by the combat that he staggered as he rose. Bomba made a gesture forbidding him to come and hastened on.

There was ample need of haste. For the rain had not abated one jot of its fury and all the artillery of heaven was thundering more loudly than ever. The gale was almost a hurricane in its force and it was all that he could do to keep his feet.

The whole of the lowland district in which he found himself was now covered with water, with the exception of little knolls that showed themselves here and there. It was not deep enough to swim in and Bomba's inability to see the ground made traveling difficult. At times he would trip over concealed roots or fall into deep holes where the water closed over his head.

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It was annoying and exhausting work, but the hardy lad cared little for that. Something else was engrossing his thoughts—an ominous, menacing roar that with every moment grew more deadly, the roar of the Aloya threatening to burst its banks.

Desperately Bomba struggled on, seeking to reach the highlands and safety.

Too late!

The roar became thunderous. A wall of water came rushing down the valley, sweeping everything before it. It caught up Bomba and carried him on its crest as though he had been a chip!

CHAPTER II

IN DEADLY DANGER

GASPING, choking, struggling, Bomba was borne along on the bosom of the torrent.

The first rush of the waves had overwhelmed him and sunk him fathoms deep. It kept him down as though pressing him with iron hands and by the time he at last rose to the surface he felt as though his lungs were bursting.

At the first onset he had slipped his bow over his shoulder so that his hands might be free. He could swim like a fish, but all his skill counted for nothing in the way of choosing his direction. All he could do was to keep afloat and try desperately to fend off the things that threatened to crush him.

For the river was full of débris, logs and stumps and branches of trees as well as the shattered remnants of native huts that had stood in the way of the torrent. These tossed up and down and crashed into each other, grinding and splintering. Bomba knew that if one of these should strike him he would be doomed.

There were other things in the river too, alligators and snakes torn from their haunts and swept along on the tide. But deadly as they might be at other times, Bomba knew that he had little to fear from them now. They were stunned and bewildered and thought of nothing but saving their own endangered lives.

An uprooted tree came dashing past and Bomba grasped at one of the branches as it went by. But his hand closed on something that was not a branch—something slimy and squirming. As Bomba ran his eyes along it he saw the glaring eyes of a cooanaradi, the fiercest and most deadly serpent of the Amazonian jungle.

Quickly, Bomba released his grip and dived just as the snake struck. The malignant head hit the water a fraction of a second too late. The snake had thought he was attacking it, and for a moment its panic terror at the situation it was in had been mastered by the instinct of self-defense.

When Bomba rose to the surface again the tree had been carried past him. He shook his head and cleared the water from his eyes.

A little ahead of him he saw a small spit of land protruding from the water. As well as he could in that strong current, he sought to reach it. He knew that it would be but a temporary refuge, for the steadily rising flood would soon cover it, but for the moment it would afford him

a resting place for his bruised and weary body.

He clutched at a rock on the edge of it and, although the water tore at him madly, his grip held. Gradually he drew himself up until he rested, panting and breathless, on solid ground.

In the waning light he looked about him. At a little distance he descried a tree still standing. He glanced at it indifferently and then with a start his gaze became fixed.

From that direction came a call for help and Bomba could see the figure of a man hanging by the hands from a branch. He saw more than that. A little way from the man a jaguar crouched, ready to spring!

Bomba leaped to his feet and his hand sought his belt.

While from that belt the jungle boy was drawing his razor-edged machete it may be well, for the benefit of those who have not read the preceding volumes of this series, to tell who Bomba was and what had been his adventures up to the time this story opens.

As far back as Bomba was able to remember he had lived in the depths of the jungle. His only companion was a frail, white-haired naturalist named Cody Casson.

Casson was moody and absorbed most of the time, and, although he was always kind to the lad, he did not encourage conversation, going for

days at a time without speaking except in monosyllables.

Bomba grew into boyhood under conditions that made for strength and hardihood. He learned to depend upon himself, and the wild outdoor life he led developed him quickly into a skilled athlete as sturdy and vigorous at fourteen as most men twice his age.

As Casson grew older and more feeble Bomba slipped into the position of provider for himself and his companion. The jungle abounded in wild beasts and reptiles of the fiercest kind and in his hunt for game Bomba came frequently into contact with the ferocious creatures.

But there were other less harmful denizens of the jungle with which the lonely boy made friends and whom he studied and understood so well that he talked to them almost as though they had been human. Such were Doto, the monkey, Woowoo and Kiki, the parrots, whom he had saved one time when they were attacked by Geluk, the puma.

At times Casson roused himself from apathy and tried to give the lad the rudiments of an education in the English language. But this training came abruptly to an end when the two were attacked one day in the jungle by an anaconda. The reptile was advancing on Bomba when Casson shot at it with the rusty rifle he was carrying. The weapon exploded, and though some of the

flying missiles wounded the snake and forced it to retreat, others struck Casson in the head, injuring him severely. Bomba nursed the old man back to health again, but Casson was never the same after the accident. His mind was impaired and his memory was almost completely gone and he was almost as helpless as a child, so the whole responsibility now fell on Bomba.

Again and again Bomba had tried to learn something about his parents, who they were and whether they were still living. Casson had put Bomba off with the promise that he would tell when he grew older. But after the accident Casson could not tell the lad what he wanted to know, even though he tried to do so. All that Bomba could gather from the mutterings of the old man was that his father's name was probably Bartow and his mother's was Laura. Further than that he learned nothing.

This was a great grief to the lad, for he knew that he did not belong in the jungle. He was not like the native Indians. His white blood stirred within him. His mind was filled with vague and hungry longings for his rightful place in the world. He wanted to join his own people. Who were they? Where were they? The dominant passion of his heart was to find them.

How he came into contact with a pair of white rubber hunters, Gillis and Dorn; how he saved

their lives one night when their camp was attacked by a horde of jaguars; the thrilling combats he had with beasts and reptiles and with the still more savage headhunters who had besieged him and Casson in their lonely cabin are described in the first book of this series entitled: "Bomba the Jungle Boy; or, The Old Naturalist's Secret."

In one of Casson's more lucid intervals he told Bomba that Jojasta, the Medicine Man of the Moving Mountain, could tell Bomba, if he would, the secret of his birth. Fired with new hope, the lad journeyed through the jungle in the face of terrible dangers to the palace of Jojasta only to be disappointed. But Jojasta, the dreaded medicine man, led Bomba to believe that he could get the knowledge he desired from Sobrinini, the witch woman, who dwelt beyond the Giant Cataract.

Bomba, undaunted by his first failure, set out to find the witch woman. It was a task that might have been dreaded by the stoutest heart, for native legends whispered horrible things about the old woman and her Island of Snakes. But Bomba faced without flinching the unspeakable terrors of the journey and finally reached Sobrinini just at the time her life was in danger from a revolt of her subjects.

Sobrinini, who had formerly been a famous European opera singer, was now half-demented,

and Bomba could get from her only disjointed ejaculations that gave him very little of what he wanted to know. But she did strengthen his conviction that he was the son of persons named Bartow and Laura, and Bomba found in her haunts a picture of a beautiful woman who, he felt sure, was his mother.

From some words that Sobrinini let fall Bomba gathered that Japazy, a mysterious half-breed who ruled Jaguar Island, held the secret of his birth. He determined to seek him, despite the fact that Japazy was noted as fierce and cruel beyond conception. After hairbreadth escapes he arrived at Jaguar Island—so named because of the prevalence of those ferocious beasts—only to learn that Japazy was absent on an expedition to the Abandoned City.

The suspicious subjects of Japazy held Bomba captive awaiting their ruler's return, but when that return was delayed, determined to sacrifice their prisoner to their gods. But Bomba, by the exercise of great courage and craft, managed to escape from the island just before it was submerged in a flood.

From the rushing waters he drew the half-drowned body of Gibo, a native, and resuscitated him. Gibo from that time on almost worshiped Bomba and followed him into the thick of combat and adventure. And there was plenty of this

when the two sought out the Abandoned City where they fell into the hands of the cruel and savage Japazy.

A terrific earthquake helped Bomba and Gibo escape from Japazy. Bomba carried away from Japazy's stronghold a precious book, written in a strange language that he could not read, but which, he hoped, would convey some information about his parents.

How Bomba, still pursuing his quest, found himself in a poisonous forest; how he saw for the first time a great airplane sweeping across the sky; what a thrilling part that airplane played in the subsequent adventures of Bomba after he had been captured by cannibals and was about to be eaten; the flight at night pursued by his hideous enemies, are told in the preceding volume of this series, entitled: "Bomba the Jungle Boy on Terror Trail."

Now to return to Bomba as, having drawn his knife from his belt, he darted toward the jaguar and its intended victim.

Had not the man been kicking with his heels as he hung suspended from the branch and shouting for help, the jaguar would have been so taken up with its own danger from the flood that it would have paid no attention to him. But it was evident that the brute had taken the shouts and move-

ments as a challenge, and all its ferocious instincts had been awakened.

As Bomba ran, with the intention of facing the beast in a hand-to-hand fight, he saw from the quivering of the animal's body that it was on the very point of springing. He could not reach the spot in time.

With Bomba to think was to act. He halted abruptly and hurled his knife just as the brute's body left the ground. The murderous weapon whizzed through the air and buried itself to the haft in the jaguar's throat.

Down went the beast, tearing madly at the knife and rolling over and over convulsively. At the same moment the man let go his hold on the branch and fell to the ground. The terrific strain, physical and mental, had been too much for him. He had not fainted, but seemed to be in a state of suspended animation. He tried to speak, but no sound came from his lips.

By this time the struggles of the jaguar had ceased. Bomba bent over, pulled out his knife, washed it in the water and returned it to his belt.

Then he looked around him. Already the water was mounting to his knees. In a few minutes this little oasis in the flood could no longer afford him safety. He would be again in the wild welter of the merciless torrent.

And now he had another life to look after.

It was characteristic of the lad that he did not even dream of leaving this stranger to his own resources. It simply was not in his nature.

He had thought as a matter of course that the man was a native of the jungle. But now, as he bent over him and scrutinized him closely, he saw that, although deeply tanned by exposure to tropical suns, the man was white.

White! Bomba tingled from head to foot. The number of whites he had met in his life could be counted on the fingers of his hands. And each meeting had given him indescribable delight. White! And he, too, Bomba, was white! He felt the call of the blood. This white man was his brother.

But he had no time now to revel in his discovery. They were both in imminent danger, and for the moment it was Bomba upon whom devolved all the work of rescue.

Darkness was now drawing in upon them. And ever the waters kept mounting. Now they were above his waist and pulling him toward the main current.

To the right there was nothing to be seen but the surging waste of waters apparently without limits. But to the left, across a comparatively narrow channel, he thought he could see a shadowy bulk that looked like a hill. It rose far

above the surface of the water. If he could once reach that, he was safe.

With a sudden movement Bomba lifted the man and threw him over his shoulders as if he had been a bag of wheat. Then he let himself down into the water and surrendered to the current.

He knew that it would be useless to try to swim directly across to the land he had selected as his goal, but he imagined that by working in a diagonal line he might be able to make it.

It would have been a tremendous task, even if he had been unincumbered. But with his burden it was almost a forlorn hope. Only arms of iron and nerves of steel could hope to accomplish it.

The waters roared and surged about him. Floating logs upreared and seemed about to crush him. At times he was entangled in the branches of trees. Still he kept on, diving, dodging, his arms working like piston rods.

His eyes were dimming, but he could see that the distant shore was gradually drawing nearer, so gradually, however, that it was a question whether his tiring limbs could close the gap.

He put out a hand to rest for a moment upon a log that was rushing by. But he dropped his hand when the bumpy scales he touched told him that it was the body of an alligator.

Had the brute assailed him in his present state, he would have been lost. But the reptile passed

on, utterly obvious of its close proximity to other breathing things. Every instinct was swallowed up in sheer terror.

Bomba's head was reeling. His heart was thumping as though it would jump from his body. His arms and legs felt as heavy as lead. He was nearly at his last gasp.

He was working now on sheer nerve. It was only his indomitable will that kept him and his companion afloat.

Moving as though in a nightmare, he suddenly found himself in shallows. Diving to escape a log, his head touched bottom. Coming up, he put down his legs and found footing.

Summoning up all his remaining strength, he staggered up to the shore until he was wholly clear of the water. Still, this was not sufficient, and he climbed blindly up the slope to a safe distance from the torrent. Then he dropped his burden and sprawled out on the ground, his breath coming in long, shuddering gasps.

CHAPTER III

THE WHITE STRANGER

FOR a long time Bomba lay utterly exhausted. Every bone and muscle was one poignant ache. He felt as though he had been beaten with clubs. He had won through, but at a terrific cost.

Gradually his head cleared and strength came creeping back to him. He rose to a sitting position to find the stranger regarding him. Bomba looked back at him with interest.

He saw a man taller than the average with an aquiline nose, clear-cut features and keen eyes that at the moment were full of gratitude and admiration.

The man said something in the language of the natives and Bomba, though he understood, gave no sign that he did. He resented the fact that the man should take him for a native. Was not he, Bomba, as white as the man who was speaking?

"I speak English," said Bomba with dignity.

The man gave a start.

"Do you?" he asked. "Good! So few of the

Indians do. I suppose you learned it in a mission school."

"I am no Indian," said Bomba proudly. "I am white, just as you are white."

"A white boy!" gasped the man. He took in the puma skin, the Indian tunic and sandals. Then he looked wonderingly at the lad's face.

"By Jove, you are white!" he exclaimed, and Bomba's heart thrilled at the tribute. "I can see that by your features. But how in the name of wonder do you, a white boy, find yourself here in the heart of the jungle?"

"I have always lived here," said Bomba simply. The man's bewilderment increased.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Bomba," was the reply.

"Bomba what? Surely you have some other name."

"I must have," assented Bomba, a pang going through his heart because of his pathetic ignorance of his birth, "but the only name I know is Bomba, although it may be that once I was called Bonny Andy or maybe Andy Bartow. But I cannot be sure."

"Surely you do not live alone?" inquired the stranger.

"No," replied Bomba, "I live with Cody Casson."

"Is he a relative of yours?" asked the man.

"I do not know what a relative means," admitted Bomba.

"A mystery here for fair," murmured the man under his breath. "But that can wait. Before we go any further, Bomba, I want to tell you how grateful I am to you for saving my life. You've saved it twice, in fact, once from the jaguar and again from the flood. You're braver than any one I've ever known. And stronger too. You have the heart and muscles of a lion. I shall never forget what you have done for me."

Bomba was gratified at the praise coming from a white man, but his face did not betray his emotions.

"It was nothing," he said. "The jaguar would have killed you. I had to kill him. The flood would have drowned you. I had to carry you. That is all."

"That is all," repeated the man, with a smile. "Modest as you are brave. Well, I'm in your debt for life. You're the most wonderful human being I ever came across. I feel like a child beside you. I'm ashamed that you had to carry me across that flood. I should have helped you instead of hindering you. But I simply seemed paralyzed from head to foot."

"What is your name?" asked Bomba, with his usual directness.

"My name is Penfield Yarrow," was the reply. "I am an American. My home is in Chicago."

"American," interrupted Bomba eagerly. "I met a boy, a white boy, who said he was an American. His name is Frank Parkhurst. Do you know him? You must if you are an American."

"America is a big place," replied Yarrow, repressing a smile. "There are a great many people there that I do not know."

"His mother had golden hair," said Bomba hopefully, feeling sure that this would identify the family.

"There are many who have golden hair," said Yarrow. "No, I am sorry, but I do not know the Parkhursts. When did you meet them and where?"

"Here in the jungle," replied Bomba. "The woman with the golden hair was tied to a tree. The headhunters were going to kill her."

"They were?" asked Yarrow. "How did she get away?"

"I helped her," said Bomba simply.

The look of admiration in Yarrow's eyes deepened.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "You're a mighty good man to have at one's back in a scrimmage."

"I am not a man, I am a boy," said Bomba, with his customary literalness.

"I'd back you against any man alive," declared Yarrow, who was growing every moment more deeply interested in the mystery surrounding this lad in the puma skin. "By the way," he went on, as a vague memory struggled for expression, "did you ever meet two white men named Gillis and Dorn?"

"Yes," replied Bomba. "They were the first white men I had ever seen except Cody Casson."

"Then you must be the boy about whom they spread the news when they got to the coast," declared Yarrow. "The boy that saved their camp when it was attacked at night by jaguars. It seemed like a fairy story and most people didn't believe it. Did you do it?"

"I was there," said Bomba. "The jaguars came, but some did not go away again. But you have told me your name. What are you doing in the jungle?"

"I am with a party of white men that are seeking for certain kinds of herbs and plants," explained Yarrow. "We have been for some weeks in this part of the country."

"Where are the other white men?" asked Bomba.

A crease of anxiety came in the man's brow.

"I do not know," he replied. "I hope they are safe. We were together when the waters came and swept us apart. I was carried down on the

torrent until I stranded on the little point of land where you found me. But I do not know what has become of them."

"We will find out to-morrow," said Bomba. "We cannot do anything to-night, but in the morning I will look for their trail. I am hungry. Have you anything to eat?"

"Not a thing," was the reply. "I had some food in a knapsack, but it was torn away from me by the water."

"I will look for some turtle eggs," said Bomba. "First, I will try to find some wood that is not wet and we will make a fire. Then we will eat and sleep."

The storm was abating now, although the torrent from which they had so narrowly escaped was still rushing along as tumultuously as ever. But the lightning and thunder had ceased, the wind had died down, and the downpour of rain had become little more than a drizzle.

"We will go further up the hill," said Bomba, "where there are not so many trees. Some of these have been made weak by the wind and may fall. We will find a clear spot and there we will make our fire. Come."

Yarrow obeyed readily, although a whimsical smile crinkled the corners of his mouth. He was the head of an expedition and had been habituated to command. Yet he was obeying the suggestions

of this boy as docilely as though he himself had been a child. Among civilized surroundings Yarrow would have been giving orders. But in the jungle the boy was master.

They found a little clearing and Bomba left Yarrow there while he hunted around for brushwood. In the open all the wood was soaked through and through, but in crevices of the rocks and small caves Bomba found plenty of dry fuel with which to make a fire.

"Good!" exclaimed Yarrow after Bomba had secured an abundant supply. "But how are we going to light it? I don't happen to have a match with me."

"Bomba does not need matches," replied the lad, as he took from his pouch a small bowl and a hardened stick.

With incredible rapidity he twirled the stick about in the bowl and in a moment produced a spark that set some of the dry leaves ablaze.

The flame spread and in a short time the fire was burning cheerily. It was grateful because of both its heat and its light, and Yarrow's spirits rose.

Bomba disappeared into the surrounding jungle and in less than ten minutes was back with a dozen turtle eggs which he at once proceeded to roast.

When the eggs were roasted, the queerly assorted pair ate of them voraciously. Each was

busy with his own thoughts and on occasion shot quick glances at the other.

Yarrow's mind was in confusion. He was a scientist, accustomed to classify things and thrust them into their respective pigeonholes. But now he had met something that he could not classify.

A white boy, but living a primitive life in the depth of an aboriginal forest. A mere youth, yet facing and conquering savage beasts with a skill and courage that the greatest hunter in the world might envy. So ignorant that he did not know what was meant by a relative, yet a past master in the lore of the jungle. Wholly devoid of knowledge of the great world, yet bearing himself with the simple dignity that is the end and aim of breeding. Bred in a place where selfishness is the first law of life, yet risking his life for a stranger. No wonder Penfield Yarrow felt bewildered!

As for Bomba, he was stirred by one chief emotion, the fact that he was in contact with one of his own blood, white like himself. That man came from the great outside world of which he himself had only the most shadowy conception, the world that Frank Parkhurst had tried to tell him about, where there were great cities with houses almost as numerous as the sands of the seashore, where there were no wild beasts and reptiles to contend with, where houses towered in the air like

hills and where human voices came from boxes, where boys had fathers and mothers that loved them, where men laughed and slapped each other on the back.

He was glad that he had been able to help this white man. It seemed to him as though by doing so he had justified his own whiteness. He had helped his brother. He had obeyed the call of the blood. White men must stand together. He had stood by Yarrow. He felt a heightening of his self-respect. Yes, he was very glad.

When they had finished their meal Yarrow began to question the boy very gently and tactfully and avoiding any touch of superiority. Bomba found it very pleasant to ease his burdened heart of the things he knew and felt, his hopes and longings, the things he had longed to talk of with others than Doto, the monkey, and Woowoo and Kiki, the parrots, and Polulu, the puma.

So he told without the slightest thought of boasting of the conflicts he had had with anacondas and boa constrictors and cooanaradi and alligators and pumas and jaguars; of the even more desperate encounters with headhunters and cannibals, with Nascanora and Gonibobo and Japazy; of perils by floods and volcanoes and earthquakes; of his journeys to the Moving Mountain and the Giant Cataract and the Island of Snakes and the Abandoned City; told without the slightest

conception of the way his hearer was moved by those tales of dauntless bravery.

Then he went on to the things that concerned so deeply his inner life; his yearnings to be with white people; his hunger to know who were his parents and whether they were alive or dead; his unavailing efforts to get the information from the half-demented Casson; the precious book he had rescued from the hands of Japazy; his fear that he might never be able to learn the truth about himself and his people.

There was a suspicious moisture in the eyes of Yarrow as the boy came to the end of the recital.

"Poor, poor boy!" he murmured to himself.

"Perhaps," said Bomba timidly, "you may know some man that is named Bartow—Andrew Bartow—and some woman whose name is Laura."

"No, my boy, I don't," responded the scientist, in a voice that was husky with emotion. "But I would give the world if I could find them for you."

Bomba sighed and gazed fixedly into the fire.

No one knew.

CHAPTER IV

A GLEAM OF HOPE

A THOUGHT suggested itself to Bomba, and he drew from a waterproof covering that he always carried beneath the puma skin the picture that he had seen in the hut on the island of Sobrinini and also in the dwelling of Japazy.

"This," he said, handling it with reverence, "is the picture, I think, of my mother who had the name of Laura."

Yarrow took it gently from the lad's hand and studied it with interest and sympathy.

"Beauty there and culture," he murmured to himself. "It is the picture of a lovely woman," he said, addressing himself to Bomba.

"Have you ever seen her in America?" asked Bomba, still with that pathetic ignorance of how big America is.

"No," replied Yarrow, with a curious little ache in his heart.

"If you ever do see her when you go back, will you tell her that I am here and want her?" continued Bomba wistfully.

"I surely will," promised Yarrow, averting his eyes to hide how deeply he was stirred.

There was silence for some minutes, broken at last by the man.

"What was that book you spoke of?" he asked.

"Here it is," replied Bomba, producing it from his pouch. "It is in a strange language and some of it is gone. But Casson could read it."

Yarrow looked at the book curiously. He saw at a glance that it was in Greek, but it had been many years since he left college and he could only make out a word here and there.

But it heightend his respect for Casson. He had thought of the old man as some illiterate trapper or hunter who for some reason had buried himself in the jungle. But a man who could read Greek! His curiosity was aroused. This was something to be looked into.

To him there seemed to be two solutions to Bomba's problem. One was to find the lost pages and have Casson or some other scholar read it. The other was to strengthen Casson's weak memory and unlock the knowledge it undoubtedly held about the lad's parents.

"Too bad that part of the book is lost," he said regretfully, as he handed back the mutilated manuscript. "I suppose there is no chance of your ever finding it?"

"I am going to look for the pieces that were lost," replied Bomba.

"You don't mean that you are going alone among those cannibals on the chance of finding it?" exclaimed Yarrow, in surprise.

"Yes," replied Bomba. "I am on my way now to Gonibobo's tribe."

"But you will probably be killed and eaten," protested Yarrow. "You escaped them once by a miracle, but miracles don't happen often."

"I do not know what a miracle is," replied Bomba. "But I have my bow and I have my knife. I do not fear Gonibobo or his people."

The stark courage of the lad made Yarrow gasp. Yet he could see that nothing he might say in protest would stop him. So he tried another tack.

"There may be a better way," he suggested. "If we could make Casson's mind well again, he might be able to remember all you want to know. Then there would be no need for you to find the rest of the book."

Bomba clutched eagerly at the hope held out.

"Can you do that?" he asked. "Are you wise enough for that? Are you a white medicine man?"

Yarrow smiled.

"I don't know about the wisdom," he said, "but

I am a white medicine man, as you call it. I cure sick minds sometimes."

He might have added that he was one of the most celebrated physicians in the United States, that he had been honored by medical societies all over the world and that he was preëminently a specialist in brain diseases. But this, besides being boastful, would have conveyed little to the untutored jungle lad, and he forbore.

Bomba looked at him with mingled hope and awe.

"If you can cure Casson," he said, "Bomba will be glad. Bomba will hunt for you. He will bring game to your cabin. He will do all things that you want."

"You have already done more for me than I can ever repay," said Yarrow. "You have saved my life. Now tell me all about Casson and his sick mind."

Bomba gladly complied, and by the aid of skillful questioning the experienced physician got a fairly adequate idea of the special kind of brain trouble from which the old naturalist was suffering. And as he saw it, the case was not hopeless.

He pondered the matter while Bomba watched him with all his soul in his eyes.

"Where is Casson now?" asked Dr. Yarrow at length.

"He is in the maloca of Honduras," replied

Bomba. "He is there in the care of the squaw, Pipina."

"How far away is Hondura's tribe?" queried Dr. Yarrow.

"It is but a day's march," said Bomba. "It is not long since Bomba left there."

"Very well," said Dr. Yarrow. "First we will try to find the people of my party. Then we will go to the village of Hondura."

The promise filled Bomba with delight. Was it possible that this wise white man could cure the sick mind of Casson? If so, his problem would be solved. He blessed the kind fate that had brought him into contact with the stranger.

He brought fuel enough to maintain a bright fire through the night to guard against prowling animals. Dr. Yarrow wanted to divide watches with him, but Bomba would not hear of it.

"Bomba will watch," he said. "He has many things to think of and he does not want to sleep. Let the white man sleep, for there will be much walking to do to-morrow."

Dr. Yarrow protested, but Bomba was stubborn and had his way.

At dawn he called Yarrow and they made a hasty breakfast from what had been left over from the night before. Then they set out to find Yarrow's party.

From careful questioning of his companion

Bomba had got a pretty accurate idea of the locality in which Dr. Yarrow had been when the flood had torn him from his fellow explorers, and anticipated little trouble in finding it.

But the flood had wrought great havoc. The waters had subsided now to a great extent, but long detours were necessary and in many places where the trails had been wiped out Bomba had to hack a way through the underbrush with his machete. Had he been alone, he would have surmounted many of the difficulties of the way by swinging himself along from tree to tree, a practice in which he had developed almost as great an agility as the monkeys themselves. But Dr. Yarrow could not accomplish this, and so they were compelled to make their way along the ground.

Hours passed and Dr. Yarrow was beginning to fear that his companions had perished in the flood that had so nearly ended his own life when Bomba halted abruptly and studied the turf at his feet.

"What is it?" asked Dr. Yarrow.

"The marks of feet," replied the lad.

"I see nothing," said Dr. Yarrow, scrutinizing the ground closely.

"The feet of white men," pronounced Bomba.
"Two white men."

"Heaven be praised!" exclaimed the man, his eyes lighting up. "Leeds and Richardson!"

"There are other marks," continued Bomba, "but they were made by natives."

"Yes," said Dr. Yarrow, "we had a dozen or so of them with our party. When were the tracks made? But of course you can not tell that."

"Yes," said Bomba. "It is not long since they were made. About an hour. We shall find them soon."

With renewed energy, the two hastened along the trail, which Bomba followed as clearly as though it had been marked by a chalk line.

They were nearing a huge tree that stood separated from its fellows when Bomba caught Dr. Yarrow's arm so violently that he almost yanked him from his feet.

The scientist looked at the lad with surprise and with something of a touch of ruffled dignity.

"There is death in the tree," explained Bomba, as he fitted an arrow to his string.

Dr. Yarrow peered up into the tree, half expecting to see a jaguar crouching there.

"I don't see anything," he muttered.

"Look closer," counseled Bomba.

But a still closer scrutiny revealed nothing alarming to the perplexed scientist.

"Looks all right to me," he said, "except that

one of the branches seems much heavier than the others and full of knots."

"Those knots can move," remarked the lad grimly. "It is a snake, a boa constrictor, that is lying on that branch. It was getting ready to drop on us."

The man started back in horror. Now as he ran his eyes over the irregular outline of the supposed branch he could see two glittering spots that he realized must be the eyes of the monster. Those spots never wavered, but regarded the two travelers fixedly.

"Do you think you had better try to kill it?" asked Dr. Yarrow. "You are not likely to hit it in a vital part and you may wound it only enough to anger it."

"One arrow will be enough," answered Bomba. "It will hit the snake in the left eye or the right eye or in the neck. It is for the white man to say."

The scientist looked at him incredulously. This was precision beyond his experience. Was the boy bluffing?

"Well, in the neck then," he said.

"It is well," said Bomba.

He raised his bow and the arrow sang through the air.

CHAPTER V

WRITHING COILS

THE speeding arrow halted suddenly.

There was a fierce hiss, a sudden commotion, and then a great black body fell like a coil of rope to the ground.

It threshed about hideously, rolling and unrolling, while spatters of red spray sped through the air, some of them reaching and staining the garments of Dr. Yarrow.

He had jumped back to avoid contact with the floundering coils and now stood at a little distance with horror in his eyes.

With the horror was blended wonder. For the arrow had transfixed the reptile's neck, severing the spinal cord. The snake had practically been dead before it struck the ground and the threshing about of the coils was the reaction of the nerves and muscles. The jungle boy had made his word good.

"And to think that I might have been crushed in those coils if it had not been for your keen eye

and quick action!" Dr. Yarrow said shudderingly. "Bomba, my boy, you're a wonder."

"It was nothing," replied the boy calmly. "We will wait until I can get my arrow and then we will go on."

In a short time the contortions of the snake were ended and the long body lay stretched out on the ground. Bomba stepped up to the fearful head, cut out the arrow with a deft slash of the knife, wiped it carefully on the turf and restored it to his quiver.

"Eighteen feet if it's an inch," estimated Dr. Yarrow as he stepped gingerly over the horrid body, "and as thick as a roll of oilcloth! How did you come to see it, Bomba?" he asked. "I thought you were studying the trail."

Bomba smiled.

"One must look everywhere in the jungle," he said. "Up and down and at each side. The wild things do not like to show themselves. They hide till they can make their spring. Death is in the air, on the ground, in the trees and in the water. The man who does not look is the man who dies."

It was not a pleasant thought and the scientist did no more day dreaming on that trail.

They trudged along for about an hour more and then Bomba halted in his tracks. He held up his head and sniffed the air.

"Do you hear anything?" asked Dr. Yarrow, instantly on the alert.

"No," said Bomba. "I smell. I get the scent of men. I do not know who they are. They may be headhunters—enemies. Stay here until I see."

Dr. Yarrow obeyed and Bomba slipped noiselessly through the brush ahead of them, drifting like a ghost. One moment Dr. Yarrow saw him—the next he had disappeared.

It was with great relief that at the end of ten minutes the scientist saw the boy returning and noted by his face that there was nothing to be dreaded.

"It is well," announced Bomba. "There are two white men and some natives. They are sitting on the ground. Their faces are sad."

"Worrying about me, I suppose," observed Dr. Yarrow, his own face jubilant. "They're in for a little surprise."

Bomba led the way and they hurried forward. They made no pretense of secrecy, and as they burst through the bushes into a little clearing they faced men who had grasped their rifles and jungle arms and sprung to their feet to repel a possible attack.

At the sight of the newcomers, however, the two white men of the party let out a whoop of exultation and the next instant the three Americans were shaking hands and pounding each other

on the back, all trying to talk at once, while questions and answers tumbled over each other in rapid succession.

"We'd almost given you up, Pen," declared a man of medium height, broad shoulders and intelligent face. "Thank heaven you're safe and sound!"

"Had a close call, Mark," returned Dr. Yarrow. "Just managed to pull through. Not by my own efforts, either."

"Thought you were a goner for sure," said the third man of the group, slenderer and much younger than the others, of a keen and genial countenance. "Have been hunting for you all day."

"Same thing I've been doing for you, Dave," was Dr. Yarrow's rejoinder.

"Who's the picturesque young Indian you've brought along?" asked curiously the man who had been addressed as Dave.

"That *I've* brought along!" snorted Dr. Yarrow. "Say, rather, who's brought me along as though I'd been a babe in the woods. He isn't an Indian, either. He's as white as you or I. Come here, Bomba," he called to the lad, who had been standing quietly at a little distance. "I want you to meet my two friends, Mark Richardson and David Leeds. And you two," he went on address-

ing his friends, "I want you to know the bravest, finest boy that stands on two feet."

The white men extended their hands in friendly fashion and Bomba took them in his own. A thrill went through him as he felt the warm, close clasp. The Indians never shook hands. White men did. And these white men were shaking hands with him as an equal because he, too, was white. He felt that he was being admitted into the white brotherhood.

"Why do I say that he's the bravest boy that stands on two feet?" continued Dr. Yarrow, as he put his hand on the lad's shoulder. "I'll tell you why. Yesterday he sent his knife whizzing into the throat of a jaguar who was crouching to spring at me. Then he slung me over his back and swam a raging torrent to bring me to safety. Less than an hour ago he shot an arrow into the neck of a boa constrictor that was waiting to drop on me. Saved my life three times in the course of twenty-four hours. I tell you he's a marvel."

It was a cordial introduction and Bomba blushed to the ears. He wondered why they made so much of what to him was simply a part of the day's work. But it was very pleasant, just the same, and his heart warmed to these friendly people whose unstinted admiration showed in their eyes.

Dr. Yarrow gave an order to the native helpers

who squatted about, looking on wonderingly, and they set about preparing a meal. While they were busy at that the head of the party learned from Leeds and Richardson how they had fared when the flood had burst upon them.

"It was a fearful mix-up, but we had luck," said Richardson. "You remember that when the torrent came down it caught you full force and swept you away. But Dave and I happened to be on the very fringe of it, as we had gone to the edge of the camp to look at a certain plant that stirred our curiosity. The water lapped us up to the knees and knocked us down, but before it got us fully in its grip we were able to win clear of it and scramble to higher ground. Then we turned to and tried to rescue some of the natives."

"Were any of them drowned?" asked Dr. Yarrow, looking around at his force of helpers. "Seems to me we have fewer than we had."

"Half a dozen of the poor fellows were carried away," replied Richardson sadly. "How many of them were actually drowned, I don't know. Some of them may have escaped just as you did. But none of them has turned up and I'm afraid they're done for."

"Too bad," murmured Dr. Yarrow sympathetically.

"It's going to be rather hard work to get more," said Richardson thoughtfully. "They're

superstitious, you know, and on account of the flood they may think that we are under the anger of the gods. Then, too, we don't know much of the tribes around here, so far from our base. They may be treacherous, lead us into an ambush, or something of the kind."

"I think this young friend of ours may solve that problem," remarked Dr. Yarrow. "He knows a tribe of friendly Indians around here, the Araos, I think he calls them, and I've promised to go with him to their maloca, their native village. The boy will do all he can to help us. Besides, he thinks that I can do him a favor," and he went on to narrate what Bomba had told him about the plight of Casson.

His companions listened with intense interest, the human side of the case appealing to them as well as the scientific.

"We've certainly stumbled on a romance out here in the wilderness," commented Leeds. "A white boy with all the marks of birth and breeding and an old companion that reads Greek! Let's hope we'll be able to help solve the mystery."

The meal was ready and the whites sat down to it. Bomba did so with some trepidation. He tried to remember how Gillis and Dorn had used knives and forks. The memory was vague, but by watching his companions out of the corner of his eye he managed to do fairly well. He must

show these white people that he, too, was white and on the same plane with them.

They were kindly souls and fathomed his feelings and put him at his ease. So much so that he lost his shyness and conversed with them freely.

It was late when they wrapped themselves in their blankets, after arranging to strike out for Hondura's village the first thing the next morning.

Shortly after dawn they arose, breakfasted and set out on the march. Bomba led the way, keen, silent, alert, ready for any sign of danger.

But the day passed without incident. If any stealthy animal eyes glowered on them from the recesses of the jungle, the owners of those eyes were wary about attacking so large a party.

"How far are we now from the maloca of Hondura?" asked Yarrow at about four in the afternoon, as the party, foot weary, stopped for a brief breathing spell.

"Not far," replied Bomba. "Before the sun sets—"

He stopped abruptly and with the speed of light fitted an arrow to the string.

CHAPTER VI

THE STAR-SHAPED FLOWERS

"WHAT is it?" asked Dr. Yarrow, startled by Bomba's warlike gesture, while he and his companions gripped their weapons more tightly.

"Get down on the ground behind trees," commanded Bomba, setting the example. "There are men about, natives. I smell them. They may be friends or enemies. I do not know. Down!"

They obeyed in haste and waited with bated breath.

They were in the thickest part of the jungle. The dense foliage of the trees shut out the sun and made a perpetual twilight.

There seemed nothing to the white men to cause alarm. But they had learned to respect Bomba's woodcraft. He could see and smell and hear things that were hidden from them.

Bomba, peering through the brush with his hawk's eyes, could see what to any one else would have seemed but drifting shadows. He could hear rustlings that he knew were made by stealthy figures moving from tree to tree. He

knew that a circle was forming about them. Had the headhunters come on one of their periodical raids?

One special clump of underbrush attracted his attention because it seemed more solid than the rest, a darker blur than usual in the prevailing gloom. He watched intently and could at last discern a dark head rising over the shelter of the bush.

His tense nerves relaxed. He knew that face.

"Lodo!" he shouted, leaping to his feet and throwing his hands palms outward in sign of amity. "It is Bomba and Bomba's friends. Come forth."

In answer a stalwart six-foot Indian rose to his full height and came rapidly forward. As he did so he uttered a peculiar cry, and in a moment thirty more dark-skinned men seemed to rise from nowhere and hastened toward the travelers.

"It is well," Bomba explained to his white companions as he and Lodo embraced each other. "It is a friend, the brave Lodo, the head of the scouts of Hondura."

Lodo looked at Bomba with the nearest approach to a grin that his native stolidity permitted.

"It is good to see Bomba again," he said. "Lodo thought that Bomba was far on his way to the evil tribe of Gonibobo."

"Bomba has turned back," explained the lad,

"because he met these wise white men in the jungle and they thought that they could make well the sick mind of Casson."

Lodo grunted. He was not particularly impressed.

"The medicine man of the Araos has made incantations to his gods for Casson," he declared. "If the gods do not answer, it will be in vain for the white men to weave their spells."

"We shall see," replied Bomba, who privately had little faith in native ceremonies. "How is Casson now?"

"He has not yet gone to the place of the dead," was the noncommittal answer. "He keeps calling for Bomba."

Moisture came into the lad's eyes, for he loved the old man.

"Bomba will answer," he said. "Let us hasten now, Lodo, so that we may reach the maloca of Honduras before the shadows of night become black."

With Lodo and his troop leading the way by the shortest paths, they were soon on the outskirts of the village. Their coming was heralded by the barking of dogs, and as the party came in sight the whole population came hurrying out to give their braves welcome.

They viewed the whites with curiosity, but were vociferous in their greetings to Bomba. A little

figure detached itself from the group of girls and women and came sweeping like a whirlwind to Bomba, who caught her up in his arms.

"Pirah rejoices at the coming of Bomba," said the little maiden as she clung to him. "Her heart was sick when he went away. Now it sings as if birds were in it."

"Bomba is very glad, too, to see his little Pirah," replied the boy. "Now we will go and see Pirah's father, the good chief Hondura."

His heart prompted him to seek out Casson at once, but he knew that native etiquette demanded that he should first pay his respects to the chief. So with Pirah tightly holding his hand and accompanied by his white companions, he made his way to the rather pretentious hut that sheltered Hondura.

The wrinkled face of Hondura lighted up at sight of the lad and genuine affection was in the sharp old eyes as he greeted him.

"It is well that Bomba has come," he said. "Bomba is to Hondura as a son. The heart of Hondura has been heavy since Bomba started out for the wicked tribe of Gonibobo and he feared that he might not see him again."

Bomba responded warmly and introduced his companions, explaining how he had met them and the reason why he had brought them to the village.

"Bomba has done well," said Hondura when the boy had finished. "The friends of Bomba are the friends of Hondura and his people. They shall eat our bread and meat. They shall sleep in peace in our homes. They shall have all things that they need. And to-night Hondura will give a great feast for Bomba and the white men. Hondura has spoken."

Dr. Yarrow and his companions, with Bomba acting as interpreter, thanked Hondura for his kindness, made him presents of some of the trinkets on which the natives set such store and bestowed on Pirah a mirror and a necklace that put the little maid into the seventh heaven of delight.

Then Bomba excused himself and his friends and hastened to the hut of Casson.

On the way a dancing disheveled figure threw herself in their path, cackling with hideous laughter.

"It is Bomba that has come back!" the old hag cried, peering into the lad's face. "Has Bomba been again to the Island of Snakes? How are my little pets? Do they miss Sobrinini, Sobrinini that used to wind them around her neck and play with them and whisper to them? Ah, if I had them now! Sobrinini is lonely without her snakes. She would sing to them—thus."

Striking an attitude, she began to sing an operatic aria in the cracked voice that had once held

spellbound the most brilliant audiences of Europe.

Before that wreck of what had been a beautiful and gifted woman, Dr. Yarrow and his companions shrank back aghast. But Bomba spoke to her soothingly.

"Bomba is glad to see Sobrinini again," he said. "He is going now to see Casson. These good white men are going to try to help make Casson well. And perhaps," he added, as a thought struck him that had not occurred to him before, "they may bring good to Sobrinini, too."

Her mood changed. She drew herself up with an effort at haughtiness.

"Sobrinini needs no help," she declared. "Sobrinini gives instead of takes. What are these men to her, to Sobrinini who has had kings and princes at her feet?" She glared at them. "Begone before I set my snakes on you!" she hissed.

They needed no injunction to hurry away from the pitiful figure.

"Looks as though I had two patients on my hands instead of one," muttered Yarrow.

They reached Casson's hut and entered. The old naturalist, looking as frail and transparent as though a breath could carry him away, was lying on his bed with his eyes fixed on the thatched ceiling.

As his faded eyes, turning wearily to note the cause of the disturbance, caught sight of Bomba,

they lightened with gladness and he struggled to a sitting position.

"Bomba!" he cried. "You have come back to me! You—"

His voice broke and he fell into a passion of happy weeping.

Bomba was at his side, his arms about him, murmuring words of love and comfort. He waited until the old man's emotion had partly subsided and then called his attention to the three men, who stood deeply affected by the scene.

"Bomba has brought good men with him, Casson," he said. "They are wise men who can make sick people well. They will help Casson get strong. They will help Casson to remember."

The three men came to the bed and shook hands as Bomba pronounced their names.

"It is good of you to come," the old man said feebly. "But I fear I am beyond human help. My time has come. I am marked for death."

"Come, come," said Dr. Yarrow cheerily. "We don't believe that for a minute. There may be many years before you yet. Now just relax and put yourself into our hands and I'm willing to wager that we'll soon have you on your feet again. You've got to live, because Bomba needs you."

He had struck the right chord, and some of Casson's apathy disappeared.

"Yes, for Bomba," he said. "Anything for Bomba! Do with me what you like."

With the aid of his skilled companions, Yarrow made a careful physical examination, taking care, however, not to tax too much the strength of their patient.

The result, though not wholly reassuring, was better than they had dared hope, considering Casson's advanced age. His organs were reasonably sound, and if there could be instilled within him the desire to live, death did not seem to be imminent.

Doctor Yarrow took some phials from his medicine kit and mixed a potion that was at once a tonic and a preparation for inducing sleep. Some of this he gave to Casson and, with Bomba as interpreter, directed Pipina, the squaw, who had been squatting in a corner of the hut, a wondering onlooker, to give him more at certain intervals. Then, bidding Casson a cheerful good-by, the party withdrew from the hut.

"Have you made his mind well?" asked Bomba eagerly. "Can he tell me now about my mother?"

Yarrow was moved by the boy's innocence.

"No," he responded gently. "Things cannot be done as quickly as that. All I have done so far is to try to make his body stronger. When that is done, it will be easier to heal his mind. One depends very much on the other."

Bomba was greatly disappointed. In his utter ignorance of the white man's methods and with his exaggerated belief in white wisdom, he had half expected to see Casson restored at once as by the waving of some magic wand.

"To-morrow," went on Yarrow, "I will have a talk with Casson. I will try to see how much he remembers and why he does not remember the things that he has forgotten. From his answers I will try to see into his brain. There may be some torn and loosened threads in there that I can make strong and whole again. When that is done he will remember. There are some things that only God can do and I may not succeed. But I will do my best."

That night there was a great feast in honor of Bomba and the other white guests of Hondura, and it was well into the morning before the tired travelers were able to seek their beds.

As Dr. Yarrow had promised, he had a long talk with Casson on the day following his arrival. He found the old man had had a restful night and seemed to be already responding to treatment.

In the soothing, quiet and apparently aimless way known to brain doctors, he led the old man on to talk, taking careful note of everything he said and the way he said it, trying with this as a guide to peer into the recesses of the clouded mind. Then after a long conference with his associates,

who were second only to himself in skill, he summoned Bomba.

"Bomba," he said without preamble, "I think—mind, I do not say that I can—but I think I can cure Casson's mind."

The boy's face lighted up with rapture.

"If you can, Bomba will be your slave for life!" he exclaimed.

"There is one thing necessary," Dr. Yarrow went on thoughtfully. "There is a certain plant growing in the jungle that I have reason to think will cure Casson. You seem to know everything about the wild animals. I wonder if you know as much about plants?"

"Bomba has seen them all," was the reply.

"Good!" responded Yarrow. "Do you remember one that grows up straight for about two feet, makes a double turn, and points toward the south, and has a peculiar flower shaped like a star?"

Bomba started violently and looked at Dr. Yarrow in horror.

"Do you know of what you speak?" he cried. "That is a poisonous plant—the plant of death!"

CHAPTER VII

THE SWAMP OF DEATH

"So it is, Bomba," replied Dr. Yarrow to the boy's startled outburst. "But it is also the plant of life. Many of the best medicines of the white man are deadly poisons, but they are the gift of heaven when used in small amounts and prepared in the right way. If I can find that plant, I think I can restore Cody Casson to his right mind."

"Then you shall have it," replied the lad. "Bomba will get it, even if it costs him his life."

"You told me of the queer flowers that you found when you were on Terror Trail," went on Dr. Yarrow. "Were any of these star-shaped ones among them?"

Bomba cudgeled his memory.

"No, they were different," he said at length. "They made Bomba's head dizzy. First he wanted to sing and dance. He did not dare do that, because the cannibals were near. Then he felt as if he were walking on the air. Then he wanted to lie down and sleep. They had strange

faces that looked up at me. But the faces of them were not those of stars."

"I see," said the doctor. "Some variety of the opium poppy, I suppose. Well, if there weren't any there of the kind I mean, where are they?"

"They are a long way from here," answered Bomba. "They grow near the villages of the Abaragos in the Swamp of Death."

"The Swamp of Death," repeated Dr. Yarrow. "Nice cheerful names you have. Who are these Abaragos? Are they friendly Indians?"

Bomba smiled grimly.

"Friendly!" he exclaimed. "As friendly as the jaguar that sought your life! As friendly as the boa constrictor Bomba shot from the tree! Bomba has fought with the headhunters. They are evil men. Bomba has fought with the cannibals of Gonibobo. They, too, are evil men. Bomba has never met the Abaragos, but he has heard that they are the worst of all."

Richardson made a grimace.

"Nice character you give them," he remarked. "I can see right now that a journey to the land of the Abaragos is going to be no pleasure jaunt."

"They, too, are cannibals," went on Bomba. "They eat their prisoners."

"Better and better," joked Leeds grimly. "How would you prefer to be served up, Mark, as steaks or in a goulash?"

Yarrow paid no attention to the persiflage. He was frowning thoughtfully.

"Are you sure these star-shaped flowers grow there?" he asked of Bomba.

"Bomba has heard so from many of the warriors of Hondura," replied the lad. "They say that there are certain times of the year when the flowers lose their power to do harm. Then the natives worship them and make a great festival."

"How far away is this land of the Abaragos?" asked Yarrow after a moment.

"About eight days of marching," was the reply. "If the weather is bad, it may be ten."

"How about it, Dave and Mark?" asked Dr. Yarrow, turning to his companions. "I don't want to go into this without your full consent. It may be a matter of life and death. But if we find that plant and it works in Casson's case, we'll have done something of immense benefit to the world. A discovery like that alone would justify all the work and time and expense we've had in making this trip to the jungle of the Amazon."

"Count me in," said Mark Richardson. "I'm so tough that, if the cannibals do eat me, I'll have the satisfaction of giving them indigestion."

"Same here," laughed David Leeds. "We're risking our lives anyway, every day we stay in this jungle. We might as well take our chances with the Abaragos as with anybody else."

"I thought you'd be willing," remarked Dr. Yarrow. "Well, then, we'll consider it settled. But we can't start to-day or to-morrow. We lost so much in the flood that we'll have to reorganize our expedition. We must see how many men the chief can spare us to go along. Then, too, I want a day or two more to observe Casson, talk with him and see how he reacts to my treatment. But on the third day from now, if all goes well, we'll start out for the country of the Abaragos. Of course you'll go along and be our guide?" he added, turning to Bomba.

"Yes," replied the lad. "Bomba has never been there, but he knows the direction and can find his way by the sun and stars."

"I'll bet you can!" declared Dr. Yarrow. "There isn't anything I wouldn't back you to do. I'd rather have you beside me than any twenty men. And now, Bomba, let's go to our friend Hondura and see what he thinks of it."

They found that there was no doubt at all as to what Hondura thought of it.

"If you go to the land of the Abaragos, you go to the place of death," he declared, shaking his grizzled head. "They are evil men and there are many of them. They worship that plant as their god and they will fight hard to keep their god from being taken away from them. No, it is not wise to go."

"But we are going for the sake of Casson," said Bomba. "The white man thinks that the plant with the star-shaped flower will make Casson well."

But on this point Hondura was quite as skeptical as Lodo had been.

"Our medicine men are wiser than the white man," he stated. "They have power from the gods. If they cannot make Casson well, it is because they do not want the veil to be taken from Casson's mind. How can the white man do what the gods forbid?"

There was no making head against this ingrained superstition, and Bomba tried another tack.

"Hondura has said that Bomba is to him as a son," he said. "How can a father refuse that on which his son has set his heart? Why should he fear for Bomba? Has he not fought with the headhunters and with the cannibals? Has he not led Hondura's men before and brought them back safe? Why should not Hondura let Bomba now have some of his braves to lead to the land of the Abaragos?"

The old chief cogitated for a few minutes.

"Hondura owes much to Bomba," he said at length. "He has no power to keep Bomba from doing what he will. But Hondura is the father of his tribe. He ought not to send his braves to

death at the hands of the Abaragos. He must not make widows of their wives and orphans of their children."

He paused and Bomba feared that his request had failed. But hope revived at the chief's next words.

"But this much will Hondura do," the old chief went on. "He will not command his men to go. But if there be any among the young bucks who have no wives or children who wish to go with Bomba, they may do so. Hondura has spoken."

With this permission Bomba and Dr. Yarrow were forced to be content, and they removed themselves from the chief's presence before he should have time to reconsider.

The lad went at once to the younger warriors, whose blood was hot and ardent for adventure. His prestige among them was great. Despite his years, no one in the jungle had an eye so keen, a foot so swift, an aim so unerring, a craft so cunning, an arm so strong, a heart so bold. With him as leader, they would follow to the end of the world. Then, too, Dr. Yarrow promised rich pay and gifts to all who would join the expedition.

The next two days were busy ones. The bucks spent them in sharpening and polishing their spears and knives and shaping arrows for their bows. Richardson and Leeds took care of getting adequate supplies. Dr. Yarrow spent a large part

of his time in studying and treating Casson and giving directions to Pipina for the administration of medicines while he should be gone.

The old naturalist's physical condition had already improved under Dr. Yarrow's care, but his memory was still behind the locked door that had so often baffled Bomba's efforts.

On the morning of the third day the expedition set out, numbering, with the white men's original servants, about thirty men. The whole tribe assembled to give them a royal send-off. Bomba had an affecting parting with Casson, and Pirah wept as she clung to the lad's hand.

To the beating of tom-toms and shouted wishes for good luck the party struck into the jungle.

Bomba led the way with the ever-faithful Gibo and with Ashati and Neram, the two slaves whom he had rescued from the tyranny of Jojasta on his visit to the Moving Mountain. They had begged to be taken along, and as they had at one time lived on the border of the land of the Abaragos, Bomba was glad to accede to their request. No others of his troop had first-hand information of that land of mystery and terror.

Dr. Yarrow and his two companions walked directly in the rear of Bomba, equipped with rifles of the latest make. Behind them came the stalwart bucks of Hondura, led by Lodo, most of them in a massed column, though some had been

sent to the right and left at some distance to act as scouts in case danger threatened.

The trails in the vicinity of the village of Honduras were plain and well trodden, and all that morning the party made rapid progress. But by mid-afternoon there were few paths discernible, and Bomba had to trust to his woodcraft to make his way in the required direction as easily and quickly as possible.

The first two days passed without special incident. The weather continued fair and game was abundant. The more ferocious animals, daunted by the size of the party, kept at a distance, and though there were plenty of padding feet and gleaming eyes in the forest fringe at night beyond the zone of light cast by the campfires, none dared intrude into the charmed circle.

On the afternoon of the third day a parrot fluttered down from a tree and lighted on Bomba's shoulder. The white men looked at the creature in surprise, thinking that a broken wing or other injury had prompted the bird to clutch the first perch it could find.

But that guess proved wrong when another parrot came swooping from the tree and lighted on Bomba's other shoulder. The surprise of Dr. Yarrow and his colleagues deepened into sheer amazement when they heard Bomba talking to the parrots as he smoothed their feathers.

"So Kiki and Woowoo have come to see Bomba," said the lad. "It is a long time since Bomba has talked with them. The eyes of Kiki and Woowoo are very sharp to pick out Bomba from among so many men. Bomba is glad that they have not forgotten him."

The parrots chattered back to him and pecked affectionately at his ears and chin.

"By Jove, it seems as though they understood what he says to them!" exclaimed Dr. Yarrow.

"They do understand," said the boy gravely. "They have many times talked with Bomba when he was lonely in the jungle."

He turned to the birds.

"The white man thinks that Kiki and Woowoo do not know what Bomba says," he told them. "There are many things in the jungle that the white men do not know. Let Kiki come on Bomba's hand and Woowoo perch on Bomba's head."

There was no suggestive motion of hand or head, but each parrot did instantly what it was told to do.

"Well, I'll be gumswizzled!" exclaimed Leeds.

"You win, Bomba," declared Richardson.

"If Kiki and Woowoo saw a cooanaradi lurking in the brush or a jaguar crouching on a bough, they would come and tell Bomba," said the lad. "Many times they have warned Bomba when there was danger. But now," he went on, as he gently

stroked the birds, "Bomba must hasten, for he has much distance to go. He will see Kiki and Woo-woo when he comes back from the land of the 'Abaragos."

He gave them their dismissal and they flew up in the air to rejoin their mates.

The white men looked at each other in astonishment.

Nor was their wonder lessened when later in the day they overheard Bomba apparently talking to himself. It was not connected speech, but more in the form of question and answer.

Dr. Yarrow waited for a few moments and then touched the lad on the shoulder.

"What is it you're saying, Bomba?" he inquired.

"Bomba is talking to Doto," was the reply.

Dr. Yarrow looked bewildered.

"Oh, you mean Lodo," he said, misled by the sound of the name. He looked about and saw that Lodo, the leader of Honduras's bucks, was out of earshot. "But how can you be talking to Lodo when he is so far away and cannot hear you?" he asked.

"Bomba is not talking to Lodo," explained Bomba patiently. "He is talking to Doto, the monkey."

Dr. Yarrow looked about him more perplexed than ever.

"I do not see any monkey," he declared.

"Doto is above us," replied Bomba. "He is swinging from tree to tree. He wants to come down and talk to Bomba, but he is afraid because there are so many men. Bomba is telling Doto that these are good men and will not hurt him."

The white men peered up into the trees beneath which they were passing. Through the foliage they could catch glimpses of a hairy body that kept pace with them among the branches.

"I'd like to have a closer view of him," observed Dr. Yarrow. "Call him down and let's have a look."

"Come, Doto," called Bomba, and this time an imperative tone stole into his voice.

The branches parted and Doto dropped so close to them that the scientists stepped back, startled.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BOW TWANGS

APART from a fleeting glance, the monkey paid the strange men no attention.

It shuffled over to Bomba and wound one of its arms around his neck.

"Many weeks have passed since Bomba saw Doto," the lad said, "and many more will pass, it may be, before he sees him again. But Bomba has often thought of Doto. Bomba will never forget the time when Doto helped him at the time the headhunters came to burn the cabin. Does Doto remember?"

The intelligent beast shook his head and broke into a lively chattering while his arm tightened affectionately about Bomba's neck. Then he looked into Bomba's pouch and put a hand in as though he were searching for something.

"No, the music thing is not there," said Bomba, referring to the harmonica with which he had been accustomed to amuse and delight his animal friends. "It has been lost in the forest. If Doto should see it shining in the grass, he must bring it

back to Bomba. But now Bomba must leave Doto, for he must cover much ground before night falls."

The monkey jabbered something and pointed ahead.

"No, Doto cannot go with Bomba," said the lad. "He must stay here with his own people of the tree tops till Bomba comes back from the land of the Abaragos."

The animal whimpered a protest, but when Bomba pointed to the nearest tree Doto obeyed without demur and crouched on one of the lower branches, his little eyes fixed adoringly on the jungle boy who had so wholly captured his affection.

"Who says the days of witchcraft have passed?" murmured Leeds, as the party moved on.

"I've seen so many strange things since I came across that lad that I'm ready now to believe anything," stated Dr. Yarrow. "Gentle with his friends and a terror to his foes! The body of a boy and the heart of a hero! The queerest combination I've ever met in all my life."

"And the most admirable," added Richardson.

Toward sunset the party emerged from the fringe of the jungle into an open place of considerable extent. At some distance they could see the silver sheen of a river.

On the banks of the river was a tapir feeding.

The wind was toward the travelers so that the animal had not caught their scent, and as they had halted in the deep shadow of the trees it did not see them.

"A nice bit of fresh meat for supper, if we could only get it," remarked Dr. Yarrow.

"Yes," agreed Leeds regretfully. "Too bad it's out of gunshot."

"Cannot the white men's fire sticks send death to the tapir?" asked Bomba wonderingly, for he had come to attribute almost magical power to the rifle.

"Don't believe they'd carry that far," replied Dr. Yarrow, as he measured the distance. "You don't mean to say that you're going to take a try at him with an arrow?" he exclaimed, as the boy unslung his bow from his shoulder.

"Why not?" asked the boy calmly, as he selected an arrow from his pouch. "The tapir's meat is good."

Bomba carefully fitted his arrow to the string and took aim. But he did not loose the string.

"Getting cold feet," chuckled Dr. Yarrow. "He knows mighty well that he can't make it."

A full minute passed, the boy standing as rigid as though he were made of stone.

"Why don't you let fly, Bomba?" asked Richardson at last.

"Bomba is waiting till the tapir turns," the boy

answered. "The arrow must strike the tapir at the spot where the heart is beating. Else, he would be only wounded and would plunge into the river."

"Great Scott!" breathed Dr. Yarrow. "Wonderful shooting to hit him at all, but that doesn't satisfy his nibs. He's got to hit on a spot the size of a silver dollar!"

Just then the tapir turned.

Twang! The arrow shot through the air like a shaft of light.

There was a single convulsive movement of the tapir. Then it fell to the ground motionless.

"Got him, by Jove!" shouted Dr. Yarrow, as he and his companions ran in the direction of the riverbank.

The tapir lay on its side with the arrow through its heart. It had died so quickly that it could hardly have realized that it had been struck.

Bomba plucked out the arrow, wiped it on the grass and restored it to his quiver, all in a matter-of-fact way which told that he regarded such extraordinary shooting as nothing out of the usual.

"It is well to kill at the first shot," he remarked. "Then the beast will feel but little pain."

"We all admit that it is well," said Dr. Yarrow, who had not yet recovered from his astonishment. "But there are mighty few who can do

it. I'd match you with your arrows against the best rifle shots in the world."

"It's uncanny," muttered Richardson.

They feasted royally that night on fresh steaks from Bomba's quarry. As long as Bomba's arrows held out there was very little prospect of a dearth in camp supplies.

The next day a fierce storm broke and held them in their camp for hours. When at last it ceased the mud that it left in its wake made traveling slow and difficult. Trees also had been leveled by the tempest, and in some places the forest tangle was so great that long detours were necessary.

The weather, however, for the next two days was all that could be desired, and, once out of the path of the storm, they made rapid progress. So rapid indeed that by the end of the sixth day Ashati and Neram told Bomba that by certain signs they knew that they were not far from the district of the Abaragos.

From that moment extreme caution became necessary. At any time they might come upon some Abarago hunter wandering far afield in search of game. In that event, the native would hasten at once to his home district with news of the coming of the invaders, and with his superior knowledge of that part of the jungle could probably evade pursuit.

Bomba had no intention of permitting this, if he could help it. His whole plan of campaign was based on avoiding fighting, if possible. He had no grudge against the Abaragos and wanted to avert bloodshed. All he cared for was to get the peculiar flowers whose potent brew might be of avail for Casson. That done, he proposed to get back to the maloca of Hondura in the quickest time possible.

Nor was it wholly humanity that prompted him to avoid a conflict. The Abaragos were famed as fierce fighters and probably could muster hundreds of warriors in battle. They could outnumber his own little force, possibly, by ten to one. No, the odds would be too great. He would fight if he had to, but would rely chiefly on craft and strategy.

He hoped much from the white men's rifles. He had a great respect for the "fire sticks" and knew how far superior they were to native weapons. In all likelihood the Abaragos in their remote jungle haunts had never seen a rifle. Even a few of these mysterious weapons, speaking with tongues of fire and thunder, might so work on the superstitious fears of the Abaragos as to send them in headlong rout.

One thing Bomba noted that gave him uneasiness. That was a certain weakening in the morale of the warriors who had come with him. They

were beginning to murmur, to talk in low voices among themselves, to look longingly over the backward trail and gloomily at the jungle ahead of them.

That night at the campfire Bomba talked with Lodo.

"What is the matter with the men, Lodo?" asked the lad. "They used to sing and dance about the campfire at night. Now their feet are heavy and their tongues are silent."

"It is even as Bomba says," agreed the leader of the bucks. "Their blood is turning to water. They say that they are few and that the Abaragos are many. They say that they will leave their bones in the jungle."

"It is foolish talk," declared Bomba. "We may not meet the Abaragos. Their fighting men may be away in warfare with other tribes. If we do meet them, are not we fighters as well as they? Since when have the bucks of the Araos become like squaws and children?"

Lodo winced under the thrust.

"Thus, too, has Lodo talked to them," he declared. "But their ears are dull and they will not listen. It is not only that they think there are too many Abaragos for them to fight, but they fear the sacred alligators. They say that in the Swamp of Death are more alligators than can be counted and that no arrow or knife can hurt them

because they are under the protection of the gods of the Abaragos."

Bomba pondered long on this.

"Bomba would be alone," he said at length. "Bomba must think. Lodo must come to Bomba again in the morning."

The white men had listened to the conversation with keen interest. As it had been carried on in the Araos dialect, they could not get its full significance, but they had gathered enough to see that Bomba was sorely troubled.

"What is it, Bomba?" asked Dr. Yarrow, after Lodo had gone to rejoin his men. "Has Lodo brought you bad news?"

"Yes," replied the lad. "And Bomba's heart is heavy. The men do not want to go on. They are fearful that there will be too many Abaragos for them to fight. They fear, too, that they will be eaten by the sacred alligators."

"Alligators!" exclaimed Richardson, as he looked perplexedly at his companions.

"The Abaragos worship them," explained Bomba. "The Swamp of Death is filled with them. They are very big and very evil. The Abaragos feed them and speak soft words to them so that they are friendly with the Abaragos. But they are fierce to strangers and are bigger and stronger than any other alligators of the jungle."

Leeds had taken a notebook from his pocket

and was busy turning its pages. He found what he was looking for and studied it carefully for a few minutes.

"Did you fellows know that we are due for an eclipse of the sun in the next twenty-four hours?" he asked.

"Remember reading about it some time ago," responded Dr. Yarrow, "but had forgotten the date."

"What is an eclipse?" asked Bomba.

"The moon comes between the earth and the sun, and makes everything dark for a while," explained Leeds. "Then the moon gets away and you see the sunshine again."

"Oh," said Bomba. He had never seen such a phenomenon and was wholly ignorant of the scientific reasons for it. Again he was filled with wonder at the wisdom of the white man who knew in advance that this was going to happen and could even set the very hour.

"Well, now that the lesson in astronomy is ended, suppose you tell us what the eclipse has got to do with our present situation," suggested Dr. Yarrow, with a touch of sarcasm.

"Just this," replied Leeds. "What Mark was saying about superstition suggested something. It may work and it may not. But suppose we tell these disgruntled bucks that at a certain moment to-morrow darkness will cover the face of the sun.

Of course they'll probably laugh at us—behind our backs, if not to our faces. But when they see that it actually takes place they'll have an added respect for the white men and may follow us with more confidence."

"By Jove, it's a happy thought!" exclaimed Dr. Yarrow.

"But I wouldn't stop there," went on Leeds. "The eclipse comes on. Well and good. But when the shadow is about to withdraw, what's the matter with one of us stepping out and making some mysterious gestures, waving his hands and commanding the eclipse to go away? What do you think these bucks will think of us when they see the shadow actually obeying us?"

"Bully!" cried Richardson. "Dave, I have to hand it to you as a first-class fakir."

"Playing it rather low down on their superstitious natures," remarked Dr. Yarrow. "But we're in such a desperate case that I don't know but what it's justified. You're dead sure about the date, are you? The joke would be on us if we chose the wrong day—a bitter joke."

"There's no mistake," Leeds assured them after again consulting his book. "To-morrow morning at eight minutes past ten, seen best in this very latitude."

The whole thing seemed rather incredible to Bomba. These white men, to be sure, were very

wise. But might they not sometimes make mistakes? Still, he grasped at it and resolved to put it to the test.

The next morning after breakfast he lined up the bucks of Lodo.

"Bomba has heard that the braves are longing for the maloca of Hondura," he addressed them. "They are weary of the long march and they fear the spears of the Abaragos. This has made the heart of Bomba sad. Bomba did not think that the Araos were afraid of anybody in the jungle."

The dusky warriors fidgeted about and looked shamefaced, as Bomba paused and swept them with a searching glance.

"It is because the Abaragos are so many," at length responded one of them. "If it were man for man, the Araos would not fear."

"Were not the headhunters more than the Araos?" asked Bomba. "Was not Nascanora, the chief of the headhunters, the mightiest fighter in the jungle? Yet Bomba dared Nascanora to fight him face to face and shamed him before his warriors. And the Araos conquered the headhunters. And there were no white men then to help the Araos with the sticks that spit fire and thunder. They will help the bucks of Lodo, if the Abaragos fight."

Again there was an uneasy silence.

"The white men are few," came another voice.

"If the spears and arrows of the Abaragos strike them, their fire sticks will be silent."

"Death may come to any man," rejoined Bomba. "But the white men have more than their fire sticks. They are very wise, wiser than all the medicine men of the Araos or the Abaragos. What would the bucks of Lodo say if the sun were covered with shadow so that all things became dark as if it were night and then the white men waved their hands and spoke strange words and the shadow went away?"

The braves looked at each other with wonder and incredulity.

"The white men are boasting," said one of them at last. "It cannot be done."

"Those are foolish words," replied Bomba. "It shall be done. It shall be done this morning. Then it will be known that it is safe and wise for the warriors of Lodo to follow the white men. Bomba has spoken."

He gave the signal to Lodo and the party got under way.

Bomba had achieved at least one result. He knew that there would be no desertions until the predicted event had occurred or failed to occur. Curiosity, if nothing else, would keep the bucks in the ranks.

They marched on for several hours and then Leeds touched Bomba on the arm.

"Now is the time," he said, consulting his watch. "It would be well to halt the men and speak to them. The shadow will appear within the next few minutes."

Bomba gave the order and the caravan stopped.

"The bucks of Lodo thought that the white men were boasting," the lad said. "They will see now that the white men speak truth. This man," he indicated Leeds, "will lift one hand and the shadow will come over the face of the sun. He will wait until the face of the sun is black. Then he will raise both hands and will speak strange words and the shadow will go away again."

He spoke with a conviction that he was far from feeling. He knew how foolish he would be made to look if the prediction failed. The prestige of the whites would have suffered a terrible shock and the dreaded desertion would be in full swing.

At a sign from Bomba the whole party seated itself upon the grass. The warriors were intensely curious and almost equally uneasy. Something eerie and uncanny was in the air.

At the moment the sun was shining brightly. Not a cloud was in the sky.

At the moment he had figured on, Leeds solemnly rose to his feet. He did not dare look at his white companions for fear that something in their eyes might make him lose his gravity.

He advanced slowly, his eyes uplifted to the heavens.

To his great consternation no change was visible in the sky. He felt a sinking at the heart. His watch must be wrong!

But he was equal to the emergency. He turned slowly and made a circuit of the camp with stately steps, prolonging the trip as long as possible.

He completed the circle. Still no sign of the eclipse!

He made another circuit of the camp making weird gestures with his hands. Still no change!

"Great Scott!" he said to himself. "I'm sunk. How long can I keep this up without arousing suspicion?"

Then his heart leaped.

A tiny dark line showed on the edge of the sun!

CHAPTER IX

THE ECLIPSE

REFRAINING from any evidence of undue haste, Leeds completed the circle and stood forth in front of the party. He raised his hand toward the sky and made an imperious gesture.

The wondering, frightened eyes of the warriors followed those of Leeds.

Sure enough, there was the shadow that the white men had predicted. It advanced slowly over the face of the sun. The light of day gradually faded and a wan twilight settled down.

It grew darker and darker and the night sounds of the jungle began to revive, as though the insects, puzzled at the shortness of the day, had yet accepted it as finished.

Many of the Indians fell on their faces and muttered invocations to their gods.

"Be of good cheer, O braves of Lodo," called out Bomba, to prevent a possible panic. "When it is time, the white man will wave both hands and the shadow will go away again."

Dr. Yarrow and Richardson were chuckling

with delight at the fulfillment of the prophecy. They were stirred to amusement, too, at the sight of their companion standing in silent majesty with his hand upraised.

"Poor Dave's arm will be paralyzed," murmured Richardson.

"S-sh!" warned Dr. Yarrow. "Don't let the natives hear you. This is deadly earnest to them."

When the sun had been nearly covered, Leeds knew that the retreat of the moon was imminent. As soon as he noted that it had actually begun he raised both hands on high and began his incantations.

"When in the course of human events," he began, and went on with what he could remember of the Declaration of Independence. When this failed him he started to recite Mother Goose rhymes. He kept this up until he was hoarse.

The Indians listened with the deepest awe. They felt the profoundest reverence for the wonderful white man. Never had their own medicine men so impressed them. When, almost at the end of his resources, Leeds ended in a lyrical outburst of "Annie Rooney" their subjugation was complete. For by then the shadow had entirely disappeared and the sun was once more shining as brightly as ever.

Bomba sprang to his feet and his voice rang out exultantly.

"What do the warriors of Lodo say now?" he cried. "Do they still wish to creep back to the maloca of Hondura and have the squaws laugh at them? Or are they willing to follow the wonderful white men?"

To a man the braves leaped up and shook their spears.

"The Araos will follow to the death!" cried one of them, and the others shouted their approval.

"It is well," declared Bomba, with great satisfaction. "Now we will march."

Again the party resumed its journey.

"Am I good?" demanded the grinning Leeds, as he rejoined his companions.

"I'll say you are," chuckled Dr. Yarrow. "As a medicine man, you've got them all skinned to a frazzle."

"You certainly put it over in great shape," laughed Richardson. "But you put an awful strain on my risibles. When you lit out into Annie Rooney it was all I could do to keep my face straight. You've earned a great reputation among the braves. Now it's up to you to live up to it."

"You fellows had it soft," declared Leeds. "I feel as though I'd been drawn through a knothole. My arms are as lame as though they'd been

clubbed and this beautiful tenor voice of mine will never be the same again."

All thought of mutiny had now been quelled. What could the spears and arrows of the Abaragos do to men who followed the whites who could drive the shadow from the sun?

They made good progress that day, owing to the spirit and gayety with which the men swung along.

That night they made no fires. Bomba had been assured by Ashati and Neram that now they were on the very verge of the Abarago territory, and Bomba was afraid that the glow of the fire against the sky might attract attention. So they ate cured meat only. For protection against wild beasts, in lieu of a fire, they surrounded the camp with thorn bushes and set an unusual number of the natives on watch.

When they started on the march the following morning it was no longer in serried ranks, lest the tramping of many feet should come to the ears of their enemies. Instead, the men separated and slipped like shadows from tree to tree, on the alert for the first sign of danger.

According to Ashati, only about fifteen miles remained to be covered before they would come to the borders of the Swamp of Death.

So far they had not seen a single enemy.

Bomba did not know whether to regard this as a good or a bad sign.

On the one hand, he might congratulate himself on the absence of foes as showing that his invasion of the territory of the Abaragos was known to none of them.

On the other hand, it seemed to him unnatural that there should be such a complete absence of human life in a vicinity so close to the Swamp of Death. Normally, there would be some stray hunters about.

Was it possible, he asked himself, that the prying eyes of some tribesmen had from a secure covert noted the advance of the party and darted away to the villages to give the alarm? In that case it might very well be that the enemy was on the alert behind the natural defense of the Swamp of Death and keeping their men close in order to lure Bomba and his party on to destruction.

At a little distance from the center of the camp was a great tree that rose to a height of two hundred feet. The party had halted early that afternoon, and it was still easy to see clearly over a great extent of territory.

The tree was densely foliated in its lower part, but near the top it was almost bare of leaves so that nothing could obstruct Bomba's view. He determined to ascend the tree.

He laid aside his bow and arrows and shinned

up the tree with almost the agility of a monkey. In a few minutes he had reached the top.

It was indeed a natural observatory. The tree towered so far above its fellows that there was nothing to obstruct Bomba's view in any direction.

He scanned the country with the eye of a hawk, watching for any moving thing, any thrusting apart of the bushes, any gleam of light on knife or spear. But as far as any trace of a human being was concerned, the region might have been a desert. If his foes were lurking anywhere, it was beyond the heavy fringe of trees that bordered the Swamp of Death.

Beyond that fringe he could not see. He knew there must be native villages there, but the tangle of forest effectually hid them from sight.

Feeling that there was no end to be gained by remaining longer on his lofty perch, Bomba prepared to descend.

He had gotten about halfway down when a rustling among the lower branches attracted his attention. It was not the wind that was stirring the foliage, for the air was absolutely still. But something moved the leaves.

Bomba had been long enough in the jungle to know that there is no effect without a cause. He had noted the effect. What was the cause?

He got his answer when a heavy bunch of

foliage was thrust aside and he saw the huge head and gleaming eyes of a jaguar!

The brute was moving slowly along a heavy bough toward the trunk, and its greenish yellow eyes were looking up at the lad unblinkingly.

It was directly between Bomba and the ground and there was no way to evade it. To drop to the ground from that height would be to fall to certain death.

For a few seconds the boy and brute looked into each other's eyes. Then with a rumbling growl the beast began to climb upward.

Bomba's only weapon was the machete at his belt. It was a murderous weapon when accurately thrown, as Bomba had proved when he had saved Dr. Yarrow's life. But in a hand-to-hand conflict with such a terrible beast it was all too likely to prove insufficient. One sweep of those paws would send it from the lad's hand, and even if Bomba inflicted a wound, the jaguar's terrible teeth and claws would probably tear him to ribbons.

Bomba looked about him to see if he could swing himself to the nearest tree. But a glance told him that he could look for no help in that quarter. His own tree stood alone.

All this time the jaguar had been steadily ascending and was now not more than twenty feet below him.

Bomba drew his knife from his belt. He would have thrown it, if his hands had been clear. But the thick and numerous branches prevented his drawing his arm back far enough to get the necessary accuracy and force.

It was of no use calling for help from his comrades below. Through the thick foliage they could not see the prospective combatants, and if they fired at a venture, they were quite as likely to kill Bomba as his enemy.

No, this was a matter that he would have to settle alone.

Higher and higher mounted the creeping death. Bomba, too, climbed farther up the tree. He had a faint hope that as the branches grew slenderer the beast would be afraid to venture its weight upon them.

But this hope vanished as he neared the top of the tree. For even there the boughs were so thick and tough that they would easily bear the jaguar's body.

Relentlessly as death, the brute continued its ascent. What seemed almost like joy came into the ferocious eyes. They gloated over their prospective victim.

Bomba tugged desperately at a branch, trying to wrest it loose to use as a club. It bent nearly double but it did not break.

But its very bending gave Bomba an inspiration.

He climbed no higher, but calmly awaited the brute's coming.

The jaguar's head came on a level with the bent bough. Bomba let go his hold.

The bough swept back with terrific force and struck the beast on the shoulders. It knocked the jaguar from its hold. The brute caught at a neighboring branch and desperately struggled to pull itself up on it.

But Bomba struck with the speed of light and his machete was buried in the jaguar's throat!

CHAPTER X

WITHIN AN ACE

WITH a terrific snarl the jaguar relaxed its hold upon the branch and went whirling down through the tree to the ground below.

The body struck the earth with a heavy thud and startled into action the group of white men who were sprawling on the grass not twenty feet from the foot of the tree. The natives, too, came running.

Dr. Yarrow and his companions jumped to their feet and grasped their rifles. But the body of the brute lay quiet, and on looking closer they could see the blood gushing from its throat.

They came up to it and then noted the machete imbedded to its hilt. Richardson bent over and pulled it out.

"Bomba's knife!" he exclaimed. "But where is Bomba?"

"Bomba is here," came a voice from above, and the lad dropped from a branch lightly to the ground.

They crowded around him, natives and white men alike overwhelming him with questions.

"It is nothing," said the lad calmly, as he took his knife from Richardson, wiped it carefully and restored it to his belt. "The jaguar was in the tree, but Bomba did not know it until he started to come down. Then the jaguar climbed up after Bomba. They met near the top of the tree. Bomba hit the jaguar with a branch and struck him with his knife. The jaguar fell down. That is all."

"That is all," repeated Dr. Yarrow, while he and his companions looked at the lad with unstinted admiration. "Kills a jaguar in a knife fight! That is all!"

"Great is Bomba!" chanted the faithful Gibo in exultation. "There is none in the jungle as brave as Bomba."

"I'm blessed if I don't think he's right!" ejaculated Richardson.

"And the boy speaks of it as carelessly as though he had slapped a mosquito on his hand," put in Leeds. "It's not only the courage but the strategy. Not one man in a million would have thought of it. And the quickness with which he took advantage of the brute's bewilderment and killed him before he could recover! The boy is simply a wonder."

"He's all of that," assented Dr. Yarrow. "I'm learning that more and more every day."

Bomba was restless that night and slept only at intervals. It was not the fight with the jaguar that kept him awake, for he had already dismissed that from his mind. It was rather the fact that they had nearly reached the region they had sought and the heavy responsibility that rested on him as the leader of the expedition.

He rose at the first dim streak of dawn before any other of the party was stirring, went down to a brook near by, drank copiously and dipped his head into its cool waters. Then, refreshed, he came back to the camp.

He glanced carelessly at the white men wrapped in their blankets. Then he looked again and focused his eyes on the blanket beneath which Leeds was stretched.

For there was something queer about that blanket. It seemed heavily bunched near the center. And there was a curious iridescent color in that bunch that did not seem to extend to the rest of the covering. Then the bunch moved.

Bomba's heart moved also, far more quickly than usual. He knew what that bunch was. It was the jararaca, a deadly snake of the Brazilian jungle!

He grasped the situation on the instant. The reptile, in its instinct for warmth, had glided into

the precincts of the camp near the embers of the dying fire. Then it had selected a warm soft place to sleep and had chosen the blanket that covered Leeds.

Now it drowsily rested there enjoying the grateful warmth of the white man's body, harmless for the moment. But Bomba knew that at the slightest movement of the sleeping man the snake would take alarm, would strike like lightning and send its deadly venom through its victim's veins.

But was Leeds sleeping? Was it natural that, feeling the discomfort of that body on his breast, the sleeper should not stir?

Bomba shifted his position ever so slightly and got his answer.

No, Leeds was not sleeping. His eyes were wide open, fixed in an awful stare. Bomba knew that he must be suffering the agonies of death.

The lad cautiously fitted an arrow to his bowstring.

It would have been an easy matter to send the arrow into those bunched coils that offered so fair a target. But that would not be enough. If only wounded, the snake would still have time to strike. Bomba must not wound. He must kill!

The lad sank down on one knee and drew his bowstring taut. Then he shouted.

The snake lifted its ugly triangular head from

the mass of coils, and its eyes glared about to detect the disturber of its rest.

Bomba's arrow sped through the air and crushed that ugly head into a mass of pulp. The creature floundered and thrashed about and the coils slid off the blanket.

At the same instant Leeds threw the blanket aside and rolled himself as far away from those writhing coils as possible. His face was ghastly white, and though he tried to speak, no word came from his lips.

Bomba rushed to him and lifted him to his feet. He had to sustain him there, or Leeds' sagging legs would have let him down to the ground.

Bomba's shout had aroused the camp, and the men came running to the scene.

There was little need of explanation. That horrid body and shattered head, now perfectly quiet, told the story.

Dr. Yarrow and Richardson applied some restoratives to Leeds, but it was some time before he recovered enough from his collapsed condition to be able to speak.

"The most horrible experience of my life," he said. "I had wakened perhaps an hour before Bomba came on the scene and felt something heavy resting on my chest. I had a mad desire to shout, to strike at the infernal thing, when I realized what it was. But I knew that would sign

my death warrant, and, somehow or other, I hung on to myself."

"You had wonderful nerve, Dave, old man," said Dr. Yarrow warmly.

"You can't imagine how I felt when I saw Bomba," went on Leeds. "I caught a glimpse of him out of the corner of my eye and knew that he was planning something. But what it was I couldn't imagine. I couldn't figure any way he could get rid of the snake without the thing getting me first. I knew he could wound it, but I feared he wouldn't hit a vital part."

"Trust that boy to do anything!" exclaimed Dr. Yarrow. "I don't know which is quickest, his eye, his brain or his act."

"I owe my life to you, Bomba," said Leeds earnestly, turning to the lad, who had been standing quietly by. "I'll never forget it as long as I have breath."

"Bomba is glad," replied the boy simply. "He is always glad to help the white men. Bomba himself is white and he feels that the white men are his brothers."

"And proud to be," declared Dr. Yarrow warmly. "You're the whitest lad I ever met."

Bomba glowed. To his heart, longing to be reunited with his own race, there could be no sweeter praise than that. It was great to be white. But to be the whitest!

To be sure, he would have done the same thing for Gibo or any human being that he had done for Leeds. But there was a peculiar zest in that morning's work, because it had saved a white man, white as his, Bomba's, father and mother had been white, as he himself was white. He had vindicated his blood.

If Bomba had been cautious before, he was doubly so now. Every possible measure was taken to conceal the movements of the party from the prying eyes of enemies. Every advantage of brushwood and thicket and tree was taken to throw a screen over their movements.

This, of course, entailed delay but this day that did not much matter. For Bomba knew that he could reach his destination, anyway, and was not anxious to do so much before the late afternoon. At that time any enemies that might have been abroad would be on the way to their homes or would already have arrived there. For the residents of the jungle have good reason to fear the night.

The sun was within two hours of setting when Ashati touched Bomba's arm.

"We are there, master," he murmured. "Yonder is the Swamp of Death!"

CHAPTER XI

TAKING RISKS

BOMBA's heart thrilled at Ashati's words. At last he had reached his destination.

He gazed eagerly at the scene before him. It was gloomy enough, in all conscience.

Ahead of him stretched a heavy strip of woodland. It extended north and south as far as the eye could reach. Great trees, whose leaves were a poisonous copper green, formed what seemed to be an impenetrable phalanx. At their foot the ground was marshy and at intervals in the gloomy regions behind them Bomba could see sullen black streams of sluggish water.

"Has Ashati ever seen what lies beyond those trees?" queried Bomba, after a few minutes of silence.

"The gods forbid!" exclaimed the native fervently. "But Ashati knows from the talk of the old men of the tribe what lies there. It is a place accursed of the gods. There is black mud that catches the feet of the traveler and drags him down to death. There are streams that swarm

with the alligators that the Abaragos worship. There are flowers whose breath is death. There are demons there whose forms are like the white mist and whose eyes glow like coals of fire. The knife can not cut them. The arrows cannot sting them. They are there now behind the trees waiting for Bomba. They are laughing while they wait and twisting their hands together."

"Ashati speaks foolish words," returned the lad sternly. "There are no ghosts or demons. Bomba has never yet met anything that his knife could not cut or his arrows sting. Tell me, Ashati. Where lie the villages of the Abaragos?"

"An hour's march beyond the swamp," replied the native. "They do not dare dwell too near because of the poison of the flowers. There are paths through the swamp which only the Abaragos know, and they walk those paths when they come from the other side to this to do their hunting."

"It is well," said Bomba, after a few minutes of reflection. "Bomba will think over what Ashati has said. Now he will have talk with the white men."

Bomba went back to the little group of scientists, who had been watching interestedly his conversation with Ashati.

"Well," said Dr. Yarrow, "has Ashati told you what you wanted to know?"

"He has told little but what Bomba had

guessed," replied the lad. "He has never been in the Swamp of Death himself, but has heard much from the old men of his tribe. But he is sure the poison flowers are there. It is for that that the Abaragos villages are an hour's march from the Swamp."

"That's good as far as it goes," remarked Richardson thoughtfully. "It makes it less likely that we shall be observed—unless they have a few sentries posted here and there."

"I hardly think that's probable," conjectured Leeds. "They probably depend upon the swamp itself as a sufficient protection against any intruders."

"Well, now that we're here, what is going to be the next step?" queried Dr. Yarrow. "Shall we march along the edge of the swamp, keeping on safe ground as much as possible, and see if we can detect anywhere the plants we're looking for?"

Bomba shook his head.

"There are too many of us," he said. "If there be Abarago watchers anywhere their eyes may see us. It is better that Bomba should go alone at first and find out what he can see with his eyes and hear with his ears."

Dr. Yarrow was inclined to demur to this.

"No doubt they're the sharpest eyes and keenest ears in this outfit," he said. "But it doesn't seem

right that you should go alone. You might come upon a bunch of those fellows who have seen us coming and are lying in wait for you. You're a bad man to tackle, but you couldn't fight a regiment."

"They will not see Bomba," returned the lad. "He will move as the snake moves through the grass."

"Lodo will go with Bomba," put in the leader of the bucks of Hondura.

Bomba did not think it was politic to refuse, for fear of offending the pride of the dusky warrior.

"Lodo has spoken well," the boy replied. "Lodo is a brave who fears nothing and is more cunning than the jaguar when he stalks his prey. Bomba will be glad to have Lodo go. Before the darkness gathers," he went on addressing the white men, "Bomba and Lodo will be back. It would be well if the white men should go a little way back into the jungle, so that the trees may hide them from the eyes of the Abaragos."

They gathered up their traps to follow this suggestion. Then Dr. Yarrow turned with a last wish of good luck for Bomba and was amazed to see that both Bomba and Lodo had disappeared.

"Where have they gone?" he asked of his companions.

"Blest if I know!" returned Richardson, equally

bewildered. "They seem to have melted into thin air."

"They're in that thick grass somewhere," conjectured Leeds.

"But if they were, we'd see some movement of the grass," persisted Dr. Yarrow, as he scanned the expanse that stretched between the party and the edge of the swamp.

Leeds laughed.

"That's where their skill comes in," he said. "Didn't Bomba tell you that he was going to move as the snake moves? And Lodo is a good second to him. I tell you, boys, we think we're some pumpkins in science and all that, but these children of nature can put it all over us when it comes to jungle craft."

In the meantime Bomba and Lodo were worming their way toward the border of the swamp. They moved with the utmost caution but with surprising speed. All their senses were on the alert, smell, sight and hearing.

But none of these senses could discover any cause for alarm. A profound stillness reigned over the whole region. Up in the sky a vulture wheeled lazily about on the lookout for something that would lure it to one of its horrid feasts. The thought came to Bomba that, if his force did come into conflict with the Abaragos, the vulture and his mates would have an abundant banquet.

They reached at last the edge of the swamp. They forced their way through the lush vegetation until they had got fully within its precincts. Then only did they lift their heads above the grass, and after having made certain that nothing of human kind was in sight they rose to their feet.

It was a hideous aspect that was afforded in the dim light that sifted through the trees. Gloom and horror seemed to have chosen the swamp as their favorite haunt.

Mud was everywhere under foot. The trees were covered with a foul fungus that lay on the trunks in patches like leprosy. The very touch of it sent a thrill of repulsion through Bomba's veins. Other trees, felled by tempest, lay rotting in the black mud and water. Streams without any apparent current lay here and there in the swamp, covered with scum. Nothing broke their lusterless surface except in places what seemed like logs of wood covered with knots, but which Bomba and Lodo knew were alligators.

Keeping close together, the two adventurers moved slowly along the edge of the swamp, feeling carefully each patch of ground before they set their feet upon it. Where they could, they leaped from one fallen log to another. It was slow and arduous progress, made the more difficult by the twilight that was beginning to gather

and deepen the darkness that already enshrouded the swamp.

They came to a place where a slightly more open space between the trees offered a vista to the other side of the swamp. Bomba stopped with an exclamation.

"Look, Lodo!" he said in a low tone. "Do the eyes of Lodo see what those of Bomba see?"

"It is the glow of a fire," replied the buck.

"Yes," rejoined Bomba. "And there are more fires than one. It comes from a village of the Abaragos where the squaws are getting supper ready for their men."

His keen eyes measured the distance and took note of the location of the village. He conjectured that Ashati had been right when he had said that it was about an hour's march from the farther edge of the swamp.

At the distance and in the dim light there was no way of estimating the population of the village. He knew, however, that it was only one of many and that the number of the Abaragos was reputed to be great.

Dismissing the matter from his mind, he pursued his course along the border of the swamp. Soon he became aware of a sickly, sweetish odor that rose above the fetid miasma of which alone he had up to now been conscious.

It brought back the memories of Terror Trail,

where he had been nearly overcome by just such an odor. That odor had come from poison flowers. But this mysterious plant that Dr. Yarrow wanted to cure the sick mind of Casson also bore a flower that was poisonous. Was it possible that so soon Bomba had come upon the object of his search?

His eyes scanned eagerly the gloom that surrounded him. They rested at last upon a curious group of plants on the farther side of one of the streams.

He strained his vision to trace their shape. Yes, there of a surety was the plant that had been described by Dr. Yarrow. The stem rose up for about two feet and then made a double convolution. It pointed also to the south and had at the extremity a star-shaped flower.

His heart bounded with exultation. Here was the thing that would make Casson well, the thing to secure which he and his companions had made that long and weary march through the jungle. It was a stroke of marvelous good fortune that he had come upon the plants so soon.

"Look, Lodo!" he whispered jubilantly. "The wonderful flowers with which the white medicine men make their magic."

"Ugh!" grunted the native, who still preferred the incantations of his own medicine man above the vaunted skill of the white men.

"We cannot get them now," went on Bomba, "because it is too dark to make our way across the stream that lies between us and the flowers. But there will be a full moon to-night, and Bomba will return and find some way to pluck the flowers. Then we will turn our backs upon the country of the Abaragos and return to the maloca of Honduras. There will be dancing and singing and the squaws will crown with flowers the braves of Lodo, and Casson will get well and the door of his mind will be unlocked and he will tell to Bomba what his heart wants to know about his father and his mother."

"It is well," commented Lodo. "This is an evil place, and Lodo will be glad when he has seen it for the last time."

"Now let us return to the camp," said Bomba, his mind in a joyous ferment. "The white men will be glad to know that we have found out where the plants grow."

They had thought that they would be able to walk instead of creep on their return. But the twilight was not so far advanced as they had thought it to be in the gloomy recesses of the swamp, and prying eyes could still discover their outlines against the sky. So they dropped to their knees and again began to worm their way through the grass.

By agreement, they kept at some distance from

each other, since two bodies close together might cause the grass to move unduly.

They had covered perhaps half of the distance when Bomba paused. He had heard nothing, seen nothing to arouse apprehension.

But he had felt something. His delicately attuned sense of touch as his hands and knees touched the ground had felt a tiny vibration, an infinitesimal shaking of the earth that any one else would have left unnoticed.

He bent down and put his ear to the ground. Then he knew.

Some one else than Lodo and himself was creeping through the grass!

CHAPTER XII

AT GRIPS

AT first thought it occurred to Bomba that it might be a jaguar stalking him with all the stealth and cunning of its kind.

But he dismissed this promptly. It was not the padding of an animal's feet. The faint vibration was made by human hands, delicately lifted and as delicately set down.

He tried to locate the position of the mysterious creeper. He figured that the sound came from about fifty feet on his right and a trifle in front of where he himself was kneeling.

Drawing his knife from his belt, he placed it between his teeth and moved toward the spot, making a slight circuit so as to take his enemy—for in that place it must be an enemy—by surprise from behind.

Gradually he drew nearer and the faint movements became more distinct. Then, as he approached closer, Bomba could catch occasional glimpses of a brown body on which was painted the tribal sign of the Abaragos.

The native was on hands and knees moving in the direction of the camp. He betrayed no knowledge of the proximity of anybody else.

Foot by foot, inch by inch, Bomba drew closer. Then, summoning all his muscles for one supreme effort, he leaped like a panther upon the man's back.

The shout of alarm that came from the native's lips was silenced instantly as Bomba's sinewy hands tightened about the man's throat.

Then ensued an epic struggle. The stalwart warrior fought like a tiger, but he was over-matched. He tried to reach for his knife, but Bomba threw his legs over his enemy's arms and held them as in a vise.

They rolled over and over, fighting desperately, but ever those powerful hands of the jungle lad sank deeper into his adversary's throat. The latter's tongue hung out, his eyes bulged. Then gradually he succumbed, his struggles ceased and his head hung limp.

Bomba let go his grip and rolled off of the man's body just as Lodo, who had been attracted by the sounds of the combat, came up to him.

"Is Bomba wounded?" he asked anxiously.

"No," said the lad, his breath coming in quick pants. "He could not draw his knife and Bomba choked him. He is not dead. He will open his

eyes soon and Bomba and Lodo will take him to the camp."

"Why did not Bomba sink his knife into the Abarago's heart?" asked Lodo, who followed the simple creed of the jungle that the safest enemy was a dead enemy.

"Bomba does not kill a man who has no chance," was the reply. "Let Lodo tie the man's hands with his belt. Then he shall go with us. It may be that we can learn from him many things that it is good for us to know."

Lodo deftly pinioned the man's hands, and they waited till their captive should have recovered consciousness. They slapped his body and chafed his wrists to hasten the process.

In a few minutes the man opened his eyes and groaned. He put his hands to his throat and looked up into the faces of his captors. His eyes expressed hate for each of them, but there was a tincture of grudging admiration in the way he looked at Bomba.

"Notamba has been beaten by a boy," he muttered sourly. "The squaws of the Abaragos will laugh at Notamba when they hear of it."

"Notamba fought well," was Bomba's generous tribute. "What was Notamba doing in the grass, moving as the snake moves toward the camp of the strangers?"

"What are the strangers doing in the country

of the Abaragos?" replied the Indian. "Notamba was coming back from hunting when he saw the light flash on a spear in the shelter of the trees. Notamba thought that trouble might be coming for his people, and he crept through the grass to see what were the numbers of the strangers."

"Bomba will talk later with Notamba," said the jungle lad. "Now Notamba will come with Bomba to his camp. If Notamba tries to escape he dies."

It was fully dark now and their movements could not be detected, so they helped their captive to his feet and made him go on before them.

Exclamations of relief and surprise rose from Dr. Yarrow and his companions when the trio arrived in camp, relief at the safe return of Bomba and Lodo and surprise at sight of the captive.

"Mighty glad to see you back, Bomba," said Dr. Yarrow. "Where did you pick up this fellow?"

"Bomba found him crawling through the grass," was the reply. "Bomba saw him first. Now he is here."

"Bomba saw him first. Now he is here," repeated Dr. Yarrow, with a grin. "I never heard a fight described in fewer words."

"I'll bet the fight was worth looking at," laughed Richardson.

By dint of prodding during the meal to which

they sat down a little later, they got further details, most of them furnished by Lodo, who let the facts lose nothing in the telling.

But it was not the captive that was uppermost in Bomba's mind. He was far more interested in the wonderful flowers of which he had caught a glimpse and his eyes were bright as he described them to the white men.

"Fills the description to a dot!" commented Dr. Yarrow. "I'm delighted that you've had the luck to locate them so soon. We'll go to the place the first thing to-morrow."

"No," said Bomba, "we go to-night. The moon will be full and we can see them. If the moon is not bright enough, the white men will have their sticks that make light"—referring to the flash-lights with which the scientists were provided—"and they will find the flowers."

"But how are we to get at them?" asked Dr. Yarrow thoughtfully. "You say that they're across a stream. No doubt that stream is swarming with alligators. From what you tell me of that awful swamp it would be risky enough to try to get them in the daytime. But at night—" He shrugged his shoulders.

"Bomba will find a way," replied the boy confidently. "It would be well to get them to-night, so that when the sun rises to-morrow we may be on our way to the maloca of Hondura. One

'Abarago has already seen the camp. Others may see it if we wait longer. So Bomba will go to-night.'

There was a finality about this that admitted of no objection, and the white men acquiesced.

"That boy has got us hog-tied," laughed Richardson, turning to his companions. "If he told us to cut out paper dolls we'd set about doing it."

"A born leader," agreed Dr. Yarrow.

It was arranged that Lodo with half a dozen of his best braves should accompany the white men as a guard, while the rest of the party should be on the alert and, if they heard the report of guns, come to the aid of their comrades.

Before they started, Bomba decided to have a few words with his captive. He went to where the man was standing fastened securely to a tree.

A number of the bucks had surrounded him and were mocking and taunting him, at times pricking him with the points of their knives and spears.

Bomba strode into the circle and thrust the warriors aside, his eyes blazing.

"The man is bound!" he cried. "It would be safe even for squaws and children to hurt him. Let the warriors of the Araos save their knives and spears to fight with men whose hands are free. Bomba has spoken."

They moved back sheepishly and Bomba turned to the captive.

"Bomba is not angry with Notamba," he said. "Notamba fought like a brave man."

The eyes of the prisoner lighted up gratefully.

"Bomba would speak with Notamba," went on the lad, "and he does not want Notamba to speak with a forked tongue. Is it true that Notamba did not know the strangers were here until he saw the light of the sun on the spear under the trees?"

"Notamba has spoken truth," was the reply. "It is a long time since strangers have been in the country of the Abaragos. Notamba did not know they were here. He had been hunting and was going back to his village."

Bomba drew an inward sigh of relief. He had feared that the man was a spy, a scout sent out by the chief of his people. If that were true, it meant that a battle was imminent. But if the man spoke truly—and Bomba was convinced that he did—the proximity of the white men and their native allies was still unknown to the Abaragos.

"How many men have the Abaragos?" asked Bomba, after a moment's reflection.

A stubborn look came into the eyes of the captive. He made no answer.

"Where are their villages?" went on the lad. "Bomba saw one of them across the Swamp of Death. Are the others near at hand?"

Still the captive remained mute.

"If Bomba wills," put in Lodo, glowering at

the prisoner, "Lodo knows ways of making a man speak. A little fire—some splinters under the nails—"

"Enough!" commanded Bomba. "There will be no fire and no splinters. The man is an Abarago and will not betray his people. Lodo would do the same for the Araos. Let him be in peace. Has meat been brought to him?" he asked.

"Why waste meat on a snake?" came a voice from the crowd.

"That is not well spoken," said Bomba coldly. "See that he has good meat and plenty. And if any one does him hurt, he will have to answer to Bomba."

He strode away and made preparations for the night's journey.

Half an hour before the moon was to rise they set out, with Bomba and Lodo in the lead. There was no danger of discovery, for the night was as black as Egypt. But the unerring instinct for direction that the jungle lad possessed did not play him false, and before the moon had risen the party was safely ensconced on the edge of the swamp opposite the place where Bomba had observed the plants in question.

They waited in silence, the Indians trembling with superstitious fear, the scientists awed and impressed by the uncanny surroundings, Bomba busily occupied in figuring out how he should reach

the wonderful flowers after the light should have revealed them.

Then the moon rose and cast its silver light over the swamp, tipping the tops of the trees with radiance and filtering through more dimly into the tangled recesses.

"There they are!" exclaimed Bomba, pointing to the plants with the queer convolutions and the star-shaped flowers.

"By Jove, it looks like them!" ejaculated Dr. Yarrow.

He sent the beam of his flashlight across the somber stream and the plants stood out distinctly.

He studied them carefully for half a minute and then snapped off the light.

"No good," he said disappointedly. "They are not what I want."

The words stabbed Bomba like a knife.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PRISONER SPEAKS

"BUT wh-why?" stammered Bomba, almost inarticulate in his bitter disappointment. "They are just as the white man said. They are of the height of two feet, there is the double turn, it points toward the south and it has on the end of the stem a flower like a star."

"Yes, I know they are all of that," said Dr. Yarrow kindly, for he fathomed the boy's feeling. "They fit the description perfectly, except in one respect. The flowers are blue."

"Blue?" echoed Bomba perplexedly. "The white man said nothing about the color! Bomba did not know that there was more than one."

"My fault," said Dr. Yarrow. "I should have been more explicit. What I had in mind was a red flower, a flower as red as blood. That is far stronger than the blue when I make it into medicine. The stem is a little thinner than the one that bears the blue flowers. It's hard luck that we haven't found it, but we are getting warm, as the boys say. No doubt there are plenty of

red flowers in the swamp as well as blue. We mustn't let ourselves get downhearted about it. To-morrow, no doubt, we'll come across plenty of red ones."

Bomba had fallen from the heights to the depths, but he rallied quickly.

"It is well," he said. "We will go back to the camp and to-morrow we will search for the red flowers."

They made their way back to the rendezvous, a sadly disappointed group.

"It is well," Bomba had said, but in his heart he knew that it was not well.

His whole plan of campaign had been based upon a prompt discovery of the mysterious plants and an equally prompt retreat. He knew that his small force would be at a terrible disadvantage if forced to fight an enemy that vastly outnumbered them. He wanted to avoid that if possible.

For a brief time he had exulted in the thought that he had accomplished his purpose. Now he was faced with the necessity of staying at least one more day in that dangerous vicinity and possibly for several days. Even on this first day they had been discovered. Why might not the same thing happen on the morrow?

As a matter of fact, it was much more likely to happen. For the failure of Notamba to return to his village at night would be noted, and

on the morrow a party of his friends might come across the swamp to hunt for him. Then discovery of the invaders could scarcely be avoided.

The prisoner had turned to a "white elephant" on his hands, a liability rather than an asset.

Bomba rose from his seat and walked over to the prisoner. The rest of the camp was sunk in sleep, except for the sentries.

The captive still stood bound to the tree, his head sunk on his breast. Bomba called one of the guards and directed him to let Notamba sink to the foot of the tree in a sitting position, though still securely bound.

Bomba's thought for the comfort of the captive brought a look of gratitude into the native's eyes.

"Bomba would have talk with Notamba," began the lad.

Again a touch of stubbornness showed itself on the prisoner's face. He was evidently bracing himself against any queries that might harm his people.

Bomba noted the look and divined the cause.

"No," he said, "Bomba is not going to ask Notamba about the Abaragos. Bomba has no evil thoughts toward Notamba's people. He did not come to fight their warriors or to carry away their squaws and children. His heart is full of peace. If the Abaragos do not fight him, he will not fight them."

The Indian's face grew more composed.

"There are flowers that grow in the Swamp of Death," went on the lad. "They are flowers that have a stem higher than Bomba's knees. They turn about twice as one coils a rope and they are in the shape of the stars that Notamba sees in the sky by night. Has Notamba seen those flowers?"

"Notamba has seen them," answered the captive readily. "There are many of them in the Swamp of Death. But if one smell of them too much, he dies."

"Some of them are red and some are blue," went on Bomba. "In what part of the swamp do the red ones grow?"

"Why does Bomba ask?" queried the Abarago cautiously.

"Because Bomba would have some of the red flowers," replied the jungle lad. "They are good medicine for a sick mind. There is a friend of Bomba's in his maloca whose mind is sick, and it would make Bomba's heart glad to have his friend well again. It is for that reason that Bomba has come to the land of the Abaragos."

There was a visible struggle in Notamba's mind.

"They are holy flowers," he muttered. "The people of the Abaragos worship them. They are under the protection of the gods."

"Bomba would not offend the Abaragos' gods," replied the lad. "Would not the gods be glad to

make sick people well? It would be to the glory of the gods if their flowers should heal the friend of Bomba. They would be glad to show that their flowers were so good for sick people."

The argument was plausible, but Notamba was doubtful. His gods might be supposed to have goodwill toward the Abaragos, but it might be asking too much of them to extend their goodness to people outside the tribal pale.

Bomba saw that he was wavering, and added an argument that he hoped might be conclusive.

"Listen, Notamba," he said. "Bomba will find the red flowers, even if Notamba's tongue is silent. But he can do it more quickly if Notamba speaks. It will be well for the Abaragos if Bomba finds the flowers quickly, for then Bomba will go away to his own maloca and there will be no fighting with the Abaragos. There will be no squaws in the huts of the Abaragos wailing for their husbands, no little children crying for their fathers. Is it not well that Notamba should do this for his people?"

There was a moment's pause.

"Bomba has spoken well," replied the native presently. "The red flowers are in another part of the swamp toward the south."

"How far from here?" asked Bomba.

"About three hours of marching," was the reply.

"Are they near the edge of the swamp?" was the next question.

"No," said Notamba. "They are far into the swamp and Bomba will have to cross streams where there are many alligators. It is in the mind of Notamba that Bomba is going to his death."

"Bomba is not afraid," declared the jungle lad. "Bomba is glad that Notamba has spoken. And Bomba promises to Notamba that he will not let any hurt come to him and that as soon as he has found the red flowers and is on his way to the maloca of Hondura he will cut Notamba's bonds and let him return in peace to his people. Bomba has spoken."

"Bomba is good," said the native gratefully.

Bomba left him and returned to his own fire, where he sat for some time in deep meditation.

Then he rose. The urge was on him to act at once and he obeyed it.

He roused the white men and Lodo. Gibo, too, although he was not summoned, crept near to the fire where the leaders conferred.

Bomba told his associates what he had learned from Notamba. To be sure, he had only the native's word, but his keen insight into character told him that Notamba had told the truth.

"So Bomba goes to seek the red flowers, and he must go in the darkness," the lad stated. "It is three hours' march to the place where the flowers

grow and Bomba must be there before the sun climbs up into the sky so that he may not be seen in the open places by the eyes of the Abaragos."

"We will go with you," said Dr. Yarrow, and the nods of the other white men signified their assent.

"No," said Bomba. "It will be better for the white men to stay with the bucks of Lodo. They can move through the jungle in the direction that Bomba goes, so as to be not far away if Bomba should need help. But it would not be well for the white men to go with Bomba now. They cannot travel as fast as Bomba will have to travel and they could not make their way in the Swamp of Death, where there are snakes and alligators and death-dealing fish whose ways the white strangers do not know."

"In other words, we'd only be in the way and hinder more than we'd help," remarked Dr. Yarrow whimsically to his companions.

"Something like that," grinned Leeds. "I guess the boy is right, at that. We're not in his class when it comes to junglecraft."

"Let Lodo go with Bomba," put in the leader of the bucks.

"Lodo is needed here," replied Bomba. "Lodo is brave and he is cunning. No one but Lodo can lead his people through the jungle so that they cannot be seen by the eyes of the Abaragos."

"Gibo will go with Bomba," put in the faithful native.

Bomba looked at him thoughtfully. He knew that emergencies might arise when the presence of a comrade might spell the difference between life and death. Gibo was versed in jungle lore, was swift of foot, quick to act, and Bomba had already tested his mettle in the trip to the Abandoned City.

"It is dangerous work on which Bomba goes," said the lad gravely. "He would not take Gibo unless Gibo went of his own free will. Ashati has said that there are ghosts and demons in the Swamp of Death. Those seem foolish words to Bomba, but Gibo may not think they are foolish. Is Gibo not afraid?"

"Gibo is afraid," replied the native frankly. "Still, Gibo will go with Bomba. Gibo will die for Bomba, if that be the will of the gods."

"Gibo is brave," replied the lad. "Gibo shall go with Bomba."

Their preparations were quickly made. It was still five hours before dawn. Bomba left directions that he should be called in two hours, threw himself down on the ground and in less than a minute was sound asleep.

He was waked at the appointed time, and he and Gibo set out on their journey. Gibo was armed with club and spear, Bomba with bow and

arrows and machete. Dr. Yarrow had urged that he take a rifle along, but Bomba preferred his more familiar weapons.

They disappeared like shadows into the darkness. The moon had set, but the stars were out, and by their aid they made rapid progress. Reaching the edge of the Swamp of Death, they skirted that morass of evil fame, bearing ever steadily toward the south.

Just before dawn Bomba figured out that they were somewhere in the vicinity where the red flowers grew. He halted then, and he and Gibo ensconced themselves in a thicket and waited for day.

Before long the sun burst over the horizon and flooded the world with light. Some of its rays even penetrated into the swamp and changed its darkness at least into twilight.

"It is time," said Bomba, rising to his feet. "Come. Let Gibo follow Bomba closely and beware where he sets his feet."

Gibo obeyed and together they plunged into the Swamp of Death.

They went forward slowly. Nowhere was the footing secure. The ground quaked wherever they trod on it. If there were safe roads through the swamp that the Abaragos knew and used, they were not in evidence. Water was everywhere, sometimes in pools, sometimes in large

streams. But the greater part of the vast expanse was mud, black, slimy, evil-smelling mud.

Gibo touched Bomba's arm.

"Anaconda, master," he said, as he pointed to a wide, deep, sinuous trail in the mud that led farther into the depths of the swamp.

"Yes," replied Bomba, "and the trail is fresh. It is not long since the lord of snakes went by. Gibo and Bomba must look with sharp eyes into every tree."

There were plants and flowers in plenty, but none of the kind that Bomba sought met his questing eye.

Where they could, they left the treacherous earth and made their way across the trunks of fallen trees.

They were traversing one of these, slippery with slime and moss, when Bomba, who was in advance, heard a startled cry from Gibo.

"Help, master!" cried the Indian in accents of mortal terror. "Gibo is sinking! The demons of the mud are dragging Gibo down to the place of the dead!"

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE QUAGMIRE

BOMBA grasped at once what had happened. Gibo's foot had slipped on the slimy tree trunk and he had lost his balance and fallen into the swamp.

If he had gone down head first, he would have been smothered in the muck. Luckily, however, he had fallen on his feet. But the tree trunk had been high and the momentum of the fall had driven Gibo in over his knees.

In ordinary mud this would have been no great matter. The Indian would have scrambled out little the worse, except for the mire that covered his legs.

But this was no ordinary mud and Gibo knew it. He had fallen into a quagmire, that relentless, sucking monster that draws its victims down and seems to chuckle with glee as its prey tries to escape. For the very struggle only serves to drive the captive still deeper into the deadly trap.

"Bomba is coming!" cried the lad, as he turned and hurried back on the tree trunk to the spot

from which Gibo had fallen. "Let Gibo be of good heart. Bomba will help Gibo."

"Hasten, master," begged the native, "or it will be too late. Gibo is sinking lower and lower. The demons are tugging at his feet. They will not let him go."

Bomba threw himself flat on the tree trunk and leaned down as far as he could with his extended hand. Gibo raised his hand also but at their utmost stretch the hands did not meet.

Drawing himself up, Bomba turned about, dug his fingers into crevices of the trunk and let himself down, his legs dangling.

"Take hold of Bomba's legs," the jungle boy commanded, "and draw yourself up over Bomba's body."

"It is too much," cried Gibo. "Bomba would have to have the strength of the jaguar to hold on. Gibo will drag Bomba down into the mire with him and both will perish. It is better that one die than two."

"Do as Bomba says," ordered the lad curtly.

Thus commanded, Gibo tried to obey. He grasped Bomba firmly by the ankles and exerted all his power to draw himself up from the tenacious clutch of the quagmire. Inch by inch, with tremendous effort, he raised himself up, until finally his hands secured a hold on Bomba's knees.

The strain upon Bomba was horrible. The

weight of Gibo himself, if he had been unencumbered, would have been nothing to his powerful muscles. But when to that was added the pulling power of the mud, it was almost past bearing. He felt as though his arms and legs were being dragged from their sockets. His sinews and thews stood out like iron bars. Perspiration flowed in streams down his body.

But he held on with a strength and determination doubled by the terrible necessity. He kept telling himself that soon now Gibo's feet would be clear of the clinging mud. The rest would be easy.

Then an awful certainty forced itself upon him. The crevices in the trunk were widening. The wood to which his fingers clung was giving way, slowly indeed but surely, Bomba could hear it crack and feel it yield.

"Hasten, Gibo!" he gasped, digging his nails into the crevices until they bled.

Gibo tried to obey, although he was already doing his best. But fate was against them both.

Gibo had reached Bomba's waist with his hands when the catastrophe happened. The part to which Bomba was clinging broke away from the trunk and both shot downward into the slime.

Now indeed their plight was enough to make the stoutest heart quail. There was no help to be looked for anywhere outside themselves. And

how could they help themselves when the slightest motion made them sink deeper and deeper into the engulfing mire?

Utter despair seized on Gibo. Brave beyond ordinary when he was facing man or beast, something he could grapple with on equal terms, he collapsed when brought into contact with the malevolent forces of nature. Yet such was his devotion to his master that the latter's danger appealed to him more strongly than his own.

"It was evil of Gibo to take Bomba's help," he wailed. "Gibo should have yielded to the decree of the gods and let the swamp work its will upon him. Then Bomba would still have walked the earth in the light of day. Now he is in the arms of death."

He broke into the death chant of his tribe, a weird, crooning song that sent a chill through Bomba's veins.

"Let Gibo keep silent," commanded the lad sharply. "Is Gibo an infant or a man? Bomba would think."

Yet at that moment it seemed as though all the thinking in the world could not abate the peril of his awful situation.

His tortured eyes swept the scene on every side. Nothing but mire, that same mire that was holding him now as in an iron clamp!

He looked upward in the faint hope that there

might be some overhanging bough within reach.

There was no bough. But there was something else, a matted mass of vines that hung from a tree to within about six feet above him. Those vines were almost as strong and tough as iron chains. Had they been swinging free and within reach of him, he might by their aid swing himself up to safety.

But they were not free. They had been welded by wind and wet into a tangled bunch that swayed in a maddeningly tantalizing way some six feet above his reach.

"Gibo," cried Bomba as a wild thought came into his mind, "where is your spear?"

"It fell with Gibo," replied the Indian. He looked about him. "It is here," and he clutched a part of the shaft that had not yet been submerged.

"Draw it from the mire," commanded the lad, "and give it to Bomba."

The wood of the spear handle was so smooth and polished that the mud could get but little hold on it and Gibo withdrew it without much difficulty.

He handed it to Bomba, who instantly thrust the point of it into the tangle of vines, working it about with feverish energy until some of the creepers were released and fell to their full length.

One of them brushed against his cheek, and

the touch was like that of an electric shock. He redoubled his efforts, working like a demon until fully a dozen of the freed vines were within reaching distance of his hands. He wound the lower parts of these into a strand that he knew would more than support his weight.

"Ha, Gibo!" he cried in wild exultation. "Did not Bomba do well when he hushed Gibo's death song? We shall yet cheat the mud that seeks to draw us down. Take this rope and draw yourself up to the tree overhead."

"It is for Bomba to go first," protested the Indian, whose eyes were now glowing with renewed hope.

"Do as Bomba bids you," commanded the lad. "Bomba will make another rope of vines and follow," and he drew some more vines within his reach and did as before.

Then from the very jaws of death the twain began to climb.

CHAPTER XV

THE LORD OF SNAKES

UP from that clutching slime that seemed now to grip them more firmly as though alarmed by the possible escape of its prey, the adventurers climbed, inch by inch and foot by foot.

It was heart-breaking work, made all the more arduous because of the weariness caused by their previous efforts. It seemed as though their muscles would be pulled apart.

But they were fighting for their lives. It was their last chance. It was their only chance. Panting, gasping, their eyes bulging, their heads reeling, they kept on with frantic determination.

At length with a great sucking sound their feet won clear of the mud. From that on their task was easier. But when they at last reached the bough from which the vines depended and lifted themselves up on it they were at their last gasp.

But they were alive! Whatever other terrors might await them in that horrible swamp, they were for the moment safe.

They stretched themselves along the great

bough, so utterly spent that the breath came in sobs.

Fully a quarter of an hour elapsed before either of them spoke. It was Gibo who broke the silence.

"Great is Bomba," he said solemnly. "In all the jungle there is not his like. He is as strong as the puma and as cunning as the snake. He conquers his enemies and outwits the demons of the swamp."

Over the lad's face flitted the suspicion of a smile.

"The demons of the swamp would have been too strong for Bomba if the vines had not been there," he replied. "But now, Gibo, much time has been lost. Bomba and Gibo must be on their way if they would—"

He stopped, struck by the expression of horror on Gibo's face.

"What is it that Gibo sees?" he asked in a whisper, not moving a muscle.

The Indian's gaze was fixed on a point of ground about fifty yards away and back of Bomba, who sat facing him.

"The lord of the snakes!" murmured Gibo in accents fraught with terror. "It is coming this way."

Slowly, very slowly, so that the movement could scarcely be detected, Bomba shifted his position on

the branch until he could command a view of the object that had so strongly aroused the fear of Gibo.

There, moving leisurely over the ground, was a monster anaconda, at least twenty-five feet in length, one of the largest that the eyes of Bomba had ever beheld.

The great muscles rippled under the scales that glittered with a horrid radiance as the reptile rolled along. Bomba conjectured that it was probably the same one whose heavy track he and Gibo had seen in the mud that morning.

There was no evidence that it had discovered the occupants of the tree. There was nothing hurried, nothing purposeful in its undulating progress. From time to time it stopped and let its head rest indolently on the ground. Then it would rouse itself from somnolence and go on a little further.

Bomba and Gibo might have been turned to stone for any movement of theirs that was visible. Ensconced as they were among thick foliage, they could not readily be seen.

They had no desire for an encounter with the monster. They knew and dreaded its terrible strength, to say nothing of the vitality that would enable it to endure any number of wounds that were not mortal and yet keep coming on.

They watched it with bated breath and dilated

eyes, hoping that it would again bury itself in the jungle from which it had emerged.

There was no way of flight open to them. If they dropped from the branch, they would be engulfed in the mire. If they made their way to the trunk and descended to the firmer ground in which the tree was rooted, their movements would catch the eye of the reptile and it would be waiting for them.

On it came until it was directly under the tree. Then the blood froze in the veins of the watchers as the snake began to climb the tree!

"We are lost, Master," Gibo whispered quaveringly.

"Say rather that the snake is lost," Bomba whispered back. "It is coming to its death."

The anaconda was climbing on the further side of the thick trunk, and its movements were hidden, except for an occasional glimpse of the slimy skin as it protruded over the bark. But the steady, horrid rustling told them of its progress.

Bomba unslung his bow from his shoulder and drew an arrow from his quiver. Wood and string and missile were covered with mud. He cleaned them with an end of his puma skin, fitted the arrow to its string and with fast-beating heart awaited developments.

These were not long in coming. Loop after loop, the snake threw its great body over the

bough that was just beneath that on which Bomba and Gibo crouched. Then its head with its slaver-ing jaws came over the top of the bough and settled on the folds of the huge body. It fairly burrowed in the coils, much as a bird tucks its head beneath its wing. Then it settled down as if to sleep.

This irked Bomba. He wanted a fair target. Either the head or the neck would do. But a random shot into that mass of coils would be worse than useless. It would only wound and infuriate the great reptile and it would act like lightning.

"Gibo," whispered Bomba to the native, who was between him and the anaconda, "move a little to the left so that Bomba can have a fair aim with his arrow."

Gibo did as directed.

"Now," said the jungle lad, "take a clot of mud from your body and throw it at the snake. Then throw your body off the bough and hold on by your hands, so that there may be nothing between the snake and Bomba."

The native obeyed. The clot struck the snake. It raised its head angrily and looked around. It was the opportunity that Bomba wanted.

He drew the arrow to its head. *And the bow-string broke!*

It seemed to Bomba that his heart broke at the same moment.

The snap of the bowstring had focused the snake's attention on Bomba. Its eyes seemed to the boy to glow like coals of fire as they fastened on their enemy. A fearful hiss came from the great jaws and the head reared itself to strike.

It launched itself toward Bomba as though shot from a catapult.

But the reptile, in its haste, had miscalculated. The bulk of its coils were wound round the bough and the part that remained free was not long enough to reach its foe.

With the speed of light the reptile threw itself backward, unwound a couple of coils, and with this added leeway returned to the attack.

But that one false move had proved the snake's undoing. In the second of respite, Bomba had drawn his knife from its sheath and held it poised, his fingers gripping the end of the blade.

As that awful head again upreared, the knife whizzed through the air and sliced the anaconda's head from its body!

CHAPTER XVI

THE SACRED ALLIGATORS

THE head of the reptile fell to the ground and Bomba's heart leaped with joy.

But the peril was not yet over. The headless body of the anaconda was beating about like a flail among the branches. One blow, if it landed, would sweep Bomba from the bough like a fly.

The lad jumped and caught a bough above him, and thus was able to keep clear of the thrashing coils. After a few seconds the death flurry subsided and the huge folds of the snake hung limp in a sort of ghastly festoon from the branch.

Gibo, who had watched the fight in an agony of apprehension, uttered a jubilant cry and swung himself up again on the bough.

"Did not Gibo say that there was none like Bomba in all the jungle?" he shouted exultantly. "The lord of the snakes, master of all things that crawl, knows now that he is doomed who looks into the eyes of Bomba and thinks to do him harm."

Bomba's private opinion was that the snake

knew nothing—had in fact lost all interest in mundane things—but he said nothing to chill Gibo's lyrical outburst. He himself was quite as full of rejoicing as Gibo was.

"It is well that the knife was sharp," he remarked, "and that Bomba's arm had had time to rest after climbing out of the mire. But now let us get down from the tree. Bomba must get back his knife and put a new string to his bow. Then Bomba and Gibo will seek once more for the red flowers that will cure Casson."

It was repellent, sickening work to get down to the ground beneath, for the folds of the anaconda were sprawled over the boughs and swayed to and fro against the trunk, so that it was impossible to descend without coming in contact with them. Still there was no power in them to harm and the pair conquered their repulsion. It was so much better to be outside those coils than inside, as had seemed likely to have been their fate a few minutes before!

They shuddered as they gazed on the severed head of the reptile. The terrible eyes were glazed now, but the mouth was still open, showing the awful fangs.

Gibo kicked it vengefully aside, as Bomba searched for and found the knife that had done him such service. He wiped it dry and restored

it to his belt, patting the haft caressingly as he did so.

"Knife good friend to Bomba," he murmured. "It slit the throat of the jaguar. It cut the head from the lord of snakes. Its edge is sharp for the enemies of Bomba."

"Yet that edge could do nothing without the sharpness of Bomba's eyes, the sureness of Bomba's aim, the strength of Bomba's arm and the courage of Bomba's heart," declared Gibo, jealous of anything that would detract from the merits of his idol.

Bomba took a string from the reserve supply he carried in his pouch and carefully fitted it to his bow. Then, in a small pool, he and Gibo washed off the mud that encrusted them and started again on their quest.

Warned by their previous narrow escape, they were doubly careful now to avoid quagmires and the time required to do so made their progress painfully slow.

They went on thus for hours, all their senses on the alert and their nerves keyed to the highest pitch. But it was mid-afternoon before Bomba stopped abruptly and uttered a joyous exclamation.

"Bomba sees them!" he cried. "Look, Gibo! The flowers of which the white men spoke!"

He pointed to the spot not more than a hundred yards away where a red patch stood out

clearly from the dark green of the surrounding vegetation.

"It is even as the master says," agreed Gibo, intensely relieved by the ending of their quest in this uncanny swamp that was stirring ever more deeply his superstitious fears.

Bomba's eyes studied closely the scarlet blooms to make sure there was no mistake. There they were, exactly as described, the two-fold convolution, the pointing toward the south, the height of two feet, the starry shape, the stem a little slenderer than that of the plant that bore the blue flowers.

As fast as he dared on that treacherous ground, Bomba hurried forward. But soon, to his consternation, he found himself halted by a deep stream of turbid water about forty feet in width.

There was no fallen log on which to cross, no way, apparently, to reach the place where the red flowers grew except by swimming. And Bomba knew only too well what terrors that muddy water probably concealed.

Gibo, who had reached his side, shared his leader's chagrin.

"Let us go round, Master," he suggested. "There may be other places where this land touches the one of the red flowers."

Bomba shook his head. His keen eyes had already detected that the flower patch was on an

island, completely surrounded by the stream that seemed everywhere to be of about equal width.

"No, Gibo," he said. "Bomba and Gibo cannot get the flowers, except they go through the water."

The Indian shuddered as he eyed the sombre stream.

"It is death to go in that water!" he exclaimed. "There are the water snakes whose one bite kills. And there are—look!"

He broke off and pointed to a dark, scaly body that broke the water near the opposite bank. A monster alligator moved lazily in the direction, looking evilly at the intruders.

"It is but an alligator," commented Bomba as he unslung his bow. "Bomba's arrow will send it to the place of the dead."

"Nay, but it is sacred," cried the Indian, pointing to a rude symbol in yellow paint on the creature's back. "It is a sacred alligator of the Abaragos. It is under the protection of the gods. It cannot be hurt or killed. The arrow cannot sting and the knife cannot bite. Be warned, my master!"

The boy laughed scornfully as he selected an arrow and fitted it to the string.

"Let Gibo listen to the singing of Bomba's arrow and let him watch where it strikes," he said. "It may be that the alligator is the only one in

this part of the stream. If it is and Bomba kills it, Bomba can swim to the island. It is only a few strokes and Bomba will be there before other alligators come."

The brute was now coming toward them more swiftly. Its long impunity from weapons had made it contemptuous of the power of men and the glare in its eyes told that it was planning to attack. The bank was so low at that point that it would be an easy matter for the creature to scramble up.

Bomba took careful aim at its right eye and let fly.

The arrow entered the eye and penetrated the brain. There was a fearful bellow and the brute lashed the water into foam with his tail, while the murky surface took on a reddish hue.

"So the arrow cannot sting the sacred alligator!" jeered the jungle lad as he measured the distance and prepared to plunge into the stream.

But even as he raised his hands over his head to dive, the water broke in a dozen places and a horde of alligators sped ravenously to the feast!

CHAPTER XVII

A FEARFUL CHANCE

FROM all sides the alligators converged on their stricken comrade and there was wild commotion in the waters as they tore the body into bits, fighting among themselves for the choicest portions.

Gibo was aghast and Bomba was disconcerted. There was no longer any question of swimming to the island. He would have been seized by ravenous jaws before he was halfway over.

Yet he stubbornly adhered to his plan of reaching the red flowers. And when Bomba had set his heart upon a thing he usually realized that heart's desire.

"Let Bomba seek the flowers in some other part of the swamp," suggested Gibo. "There may be many in other places."

"Have we not wandered many hours before we found these?" asked Bomba, pointing to the flowers in question. "It will soon be dark. Does Gibo want to spend the night in the Swamp of Death?"

The Indian shuddered.

"No, Master," he rejoined. "It is an evil

place in the day when the sun is shining. It would be still more evil in the night, for it is in the night that the demons walk."

Bomba did not reply. He was casting about in his fertile mind for some way to overcome the handicap imposed by the presence of the stream.

His eyes lighted up as they rested on the tough vines that hung from the tree beneath which they were standing.

"The vines have saved us once to-day!" he exclaimed. "Perhaps once more they will come to our help."

Gibo looked puzzled.

"The master speaks strange words," he said. "It is not in Gibo's mind to understand."

"Bomba cannot walk to the island because of the water," replied the jungle lad. "He cannot swim because the alligators would seize him. But with the vines in his hand Bomba may swing himself across the stream."

Terror came into the Indian's eyes.

"It is death that Bomba seeks!" he cried. "The vines may break. The hands of Bomba may slip and let him fall into the water where the alligators will be waiting for him."

Bomba knew only too well how well founded were both of the objections. But danger had never deterred him yet when he thought that the goal to be gained was worth the risk.

The alligators had now gulped down their feast and lay eying the adventurers. Whether because their appetite had been in part appeased, whether their instinct told them that the lad with the arrows had destroyed their comrade and might as easily slay them, they made no motion to attack. But their eyes kept ever on the watch, letting no least motion of their foes escape them.

Bomba reached up and grasped the vines, pulling them out to their full length. Then he twisted them into a strand that he thought would be strong enough for his purpose, tying a heavy knot a few feet up to give him a dependable handhold.

"Place your hands on this, Gibo," he directed, "and hang upon it with all your weight. Bomba will do the same."

The stout rope of withes bore the weight of both bodies without breaking and Bomba was satisfied.

"How will the master get back from the place of the red flowers?" asked Gibo.

"By the same way that he goes," replied Bomba. "There are vines over there from which Bomba can make another rope."

"Shall Gibo follow Bomba?" asked the native.

"No," replied Bomba. "It is better that Gibo stay on this side of the stream. One can gather the red flowers as well as two. Then, too, if

evil happens to Bomba, Gibo can carry the news to the white men and the bucks of Lodo."

The native acquiesced, though regretfully. For much as he dreaded the dangerous experiment, he would loyally have followed his leader through the air. But Bomba had said, "no," and with Gibo, Bomba's word was law.

The jungle lad swung himself up on the rope of withes and clutched it firmly just above the knot.

"Let Gibo draw the rope as far back in the jungle as he can and then let go," ordered Bomba.

The Indian retreated from the border of the stream as far as possible, drawing the rope and its burden with him.

"Now!" commanded Bomba.

Gibo let go, and the swing of the rope carried the lad far out over the surface of the stream.

Instantly the apathy of the alligators vanished. They saw above them a toothsome prey and they splashed about excitedly, their wicked eyes looking greedily upward, their horrible jaws open to the fullest extent.

The initial impetus did not carry Bomba far enough. He saw when he reached the end of the arc that, if he let go then, the momentum would not be sufficient to land him on the island's shore.

So he retained his hold on the vines and swung

back again past the head of Gibo, who ducked to avoid him. But Bomba did not drop to the ground, as the Indian had expected. Rather, he shot out again over the water, his arms working like piston rods to increase the speed.

Faster and faster he went back and forth until he was swinging in a tremendous arc. Then, when he felt that his momentum was at its height, he let go.

He shot through the air like a rocket, his feet barely landing on the opposite shore. The shock was so severe that it knocked him to his knees.

He rose to his feet a bit dazed, but full of jubilation at the accomplishment of his feat. It had been by the narrowest margin that he had landed.

He cast a glance at Gibo and saw that he was standing with his hands devoutly raised and his lips moving, evidently pouring out thanks to his gods for the preservation of his beloved master from a horrible death.

Then Bomba hastened on to the place where the red flowers grew.

He looked with awe on the mysterious flowers that he had risked so much to gain. What magic virtue dwelt in them, if what the white men said were true!

They were a vivid scarlet and of unusual size. Perhaps there were a dozen in the patch before him. Dr. Yarrow had said that three might do,

that five would be more than sufficient for him to brew his potion and make his test.

A sickly sweet odor arose from them that revived Bomba's memories of the poisonous flowers on Terror Trail. It was well that the smell assailed him now, putting him on his guard, rather than later when, engrossed in his work, he might neglect its insidious influence until he had become delirious or worse.

He plastered his nostrils in part with mud to obviate the effects of the deadly scent and betook himself to his task.

In his pouch was a pair of rubber gloves that Dr. Yarrow had given him when he started out. The scientist had been urgent in his warning to Bomba not to touch either plant or flower with his naked hands.

Putting on the gloves, Bomba drew his knife from his belt and used it to dig up the plants by their roots. Those roots, Bomba found, were widespreading and reached far under ground. But he searched them all out with meticulous care, for he was not sure whether it was the plants or the flowers on which Dr. Yarrow depended for their curative qualities.

He worked with energy, for the sun was already leaning toward the horizon. He knew that with his utmost speed it would be a matter of touch and go whether he and Gibo could emerge from the

Swamp of Death before darkness began to fall.

Yet with all his absorption in his task he kept a wary lookout for danger. At any moment an enemy might come in sight. Or the alligators might take their chances of catching him on land, since they had been cheated of him when over the water.

But neither human nor reptile foes disturbed him, and he breathed a sigh of relief when his work was finished and he had bestowed five of the plants with their flowers in the special bag that he had brought along for that purpose.

He flung the bag over his shoulders and waved his hand in triumph to Gibo, who was watching him intently, not having stirred from the spot where Bomba had left him.

Gibo started to wave his hand in response, but the gesture stopped suddenly.

Even at that distance Bomba could see the look of horror that came into the native's face.

"Master! Master!" Gibo shrieked in anguish. "The Abaragos are coming! Flee, Master! Flee!"

CHAPTER XVIII

IN HOT PURSUIT

AT Gibo's cry Bomba turned quickly. The sight that met his eyes was appalling.

An array of hideously painted savages lined the bank across the water from the farther shore of the island. They were thirty or more in number and daubed with the mystic symbols of the Abaragos. Most of them were armed with clubs and spears, a few of them were equipped with arrows.

They had been creeping out stealthily from the fringe of jungle, evidently hoping to take the invaders by surprise. But now that they knew from the frantic shouts and gestures of Gibo that they had been discovered, all pretense of secrecy was abandoned, and they set up a horrid, screeching din, clashed their spears and shook them furiously at their intended victims.

There could be no thought of fighting against such overwhelming numbers. Bomba and Gibo might slay a few, but in the end they would be

overborne. All that remained to the pair was flight.

But the savages would still have to cross that further strip of water to reach the island. Bomba knew that they would not swim it. They would have to rely on rafts or canoes, and of such Bomba could see no trace.

He did see, however, several braves running along the shore and guessed that they were going to get canoes.

"Hasten, Master! Hasten!" begged Gibo, frantic to have Bomba rejoin him.

Bomba had already framed his plan. He could not stay and attempt to hide on the island. It was too limited in space to afford a safe covert and it would be only a matter of time before the savages would find him.

"Listen, Gibo, and lay the words of Bomba to heart," commanded the lad. "Plunge into the Swamp of Death. Keep your back against the sun, turning a little to the right. That will bring you into the open place beyond the swamp where you will find the white men and Lodo with his bucks. Run fast, as the gazelle runs when the puma is on his track."

"No, no, Master," cried the faithful Indian. "Gibo will wait here for Bomba. He will live or die with Bomba."

"Do as Bomba bids," ordered the lad sternly.

"It is better that one be taken by the Abaragos than two. If you escape, you can bring Lodo and the white men to Bomba's help. If both are taken, the white men will wonder, but they will not know where to come or what to do. Go at once. Bomba has spoken."

Thus commanded, Gibo turned and ran and the jungle swallowed him up.

While Bomba had been talking, his hands had been busy twining a bunch of vines into a rope. But before he began the pendulumlike swing that he hoped would carry him to the other side of the alligator-infested stream he turned for a last look at his enemies.

They were equipped now with three large canoes, which had been dragged from their hiding places and brought to the spot where the warriors were impatiently awaiting them. The savages piled into them pellmell, brawny hands grasped the paddles and made for the island.

A strange apathy seemed to have taken possession of Bomba. His lightninglike celerity of action seemed to have deserted him. He stood, a prey apparently to despair.

Thus at least his enemies interpreted his immobility. They thought that he realized that his case was hopeless and that he had yielded to the inevitable.

With shouts of savage triumph they drove their

canoes across the narrow strip of water, leaped on the island and rushed across it toward the lad.

Then Bomba woke to sudden life. He swung out over the water and back two or three times until he had acquired the needed momentum and then let himself go.

He struck the shore at just the spot where Gibo had previously been standing. Then, like a flash, he disappeared into the mazes of the swamp.

The Abaragos, now halfway across the island, raised a shout of amazement as they saw the figure of the lad shoot across the strip of water. It seemed incredible that such a feat could be accomplished.

They had seen him let go, but the intervening trees hindered them from seeing whether or not he had landed on the other side. They half expected to find that he had fallen into the water and become the prey of the alligators.

So they continued their rush until they reached the island's shore. They scanned the water eagerly. But the alligators lay there, logy and lethargic. There was none of the commotion that would have been visible had they just been rending apart the body of the boy.

The warriors consulted together angrily, pointing to the now vacant opposite shore. Then they turned and ran back across the island to the place where they had left their canoes.

Now the reason for Bomba's apparent listlessness became apparent. It had not been apathy, but cunning strategy. For Bomba had seen that, if he had made his leap at once, the savages would not have come to the island at all. They would have paddled their canoes around it and reached speedily the spot where Bomba had landed. Then they would have set off hotfoot upon his trail.

Now, Bomba's trick had gained valuable time. The savages had been duped into running all the way across the island and then had been forced to run all the way back again before they could regain their canoes and make the rest of the distance by water. It had been proved once more that the jungle boy's brain was as quick as his heart was brave.

In the meantime, Bomba was putting forth every effort to increase the distance between himself and his pursuers. He had no illusions as to what would happen to him if he fell into their hands. They would not treat him with the generosity he had shown to Notamba. Death would be the least that he could expect. And he had little doubt that he would be subjected to cruel torture before death came to end his sufferings.

He knew that the odds were terrifically against him. He was in that terrible swamp, unknown to him, but every foot of which was familiar to his enemies. Then, too, he was burdened with

the bag containing the mysterious plants and flowers. This hindered him greatly, not because of its weight, which to his hardened muscles was nothing, but because it caught in the vines and brushwood and slowed him up.

He made no effort to find and follow Gibo's trail. It was not likely to be any better than he himself could pick. Then, too, each had a better chance apart than they would have together. If one were captured, the other might win through and bring the white men and the Araos bucks to the rescue of his comrade.

His ears strained to catch any sound of pursuit. As yet he had heard nothing. Doubtless the natives were still in their canoes.

On he went, struggling against almost unconquerable difficulties. Had he been in the ordinary jungle, he could have laughed his pursuers to scorn. His swiftness of foot, his endurance and his jungle lore would have easily wrought his escape. But in this hideous swamp he was at a terrific disadvantage. He had to watch every step, test every patch of ground lest it cover a quagmire. When he came across a stream too wide to jump he had to make a detour until the stream narrowed or a fallen log gave him a bridge to cross.

Snakes slithered across his path, venomous hisses came from the thickets. Alligators rose

from the murky waters. He did not try to kill. He had no time for that. His lightning quickness alone enabled him to dodge or overleap the darting death.

Then his pulses quickened as the sound of distant shouts came to him. The savages had left their canoes and were on his trail. That trail would be an easy one to follow over the muddy ground where every step left its mark.

Still Bomba did not despair.

The sounds of pursuit grew louder. Like a pack of wolves, the savages were following the trail, giving tongue as they drew nearer and nearer to their quarry.

There was no throwing them off that trail. Doubling would do no good, for it would only drive the lad deeper and deeper into the swamp.

Bomba's only remaining hope was in the darkness. If he could keep in the van until night closed in, he would have a chance.

He passed a spot where the trees thinned out and here he cast a glance at the western sky. He noted that the sun was sinking towards the horizon, but that it would be at least half an hour before it disappeared.

But he knew well that in less than ten minutes his enemies would be near enough to discover him. With their knowledge of the swamp he could not outdistance them. With every look he

cast behind he expected to see a savage face gloating in triumph. Flight as a resource had failed. He tried craft.

He ran a little farther until he came to a deep stream. Then, placing his feet carefully in the same prints, he came back until he reached a great tree. Up this he shinned like a monkey and concealed himself in the dense foliage.

He figured that the savages would pursue his trail until it ended on the bank of the stream. Then they would be perplexed. They might think that in his desperation he had dared the alligators and swum across. Or they might conjecture that he had waded up or down stream close to the bank to conceal his tracks.

There might be divided counsels as to what was best to be done. In any event it would take time. And the darkness was coming.

The cries were shriller now, and a moment later the savage horde burst through the underbrush.

CHAPTER XIX

CAPTURED

FROM his perch in the tree, the jungle boy looked down upon the men who were thirsting for his blood.

There were fully thirty of them, bedaubed with paint and bedecked with headdresses of feathers. Most of them carried a shield in his left hand and a spear in his right. All of them had knives at their belts and some in addition had bows slung over their shoulders.

None of them looked up, but ran along with eyes fixed on the ground. They could tell from the freshness of the tracks, into which the water squeezed from the mud by the impact of the boy's feet was still oozing, that their quarry could not be far ahead.

They reached the border of the stream and halted while a babble of discordant voices rent the air. Everybody seemed to be trying to talk at once.

The men scattered in various directions, some running downstream, some up, while others de-

scribed a wide circle, trying to pick up the trail.

It had grown perceptibly darker now, but not dark enough to warrant Bomba in slipping down from the tree. The sharp eyes of his foes, used to the dimness of the swamp, would have detected him instantly.

A few minutes more of frantic hunting and then the savages gathered together on the banks of the stream for a consultation. What conclusion was reached Bomba could only guess, but he judged from the sounds that followed that the party was moving downstream to some spot, known to them, where a fallen log would enable them to pass to the other side. The boy, they seemed to think, must have swum the stream after all, and they hoped to pick up the trail on the other side.

Bomba's heart beat high with exultation. A few minutes more and it would be fully dark. Then he would descend from his perch and resume his flight, and with his tracks veiled by the darkness he could defy ten times thirty Abaragos to catch him. Long before the sun rose he would be safe in camp with the white men and the bucks of Lodo.

But his jubilation turned to consternation when a half dozen of the savages returned to the vicinity of the tree. They had evidently been left behind as a matter of precaution, in case the

lad was on this side of the stream, while the rest of the horde pressed on in pursuit.

They beat the bushes in a perfunctory way, as they had little doubt that the fugitive had crossed the water. A few minutes of this sufficed, and they gathered beneath the tree. Their leader had gone on with the main party and there was no one to chide them for shirking. Weary with the long chase, they sprawled lazily on the ground.

Bomba gritted his teeth in vexation. But he comforted himself with the thought that they would not be there long. They would certainly not pass the night in that dismal swamp when in a short time they could regain their canoes and return to the rude comfort of their huts.

"May the curse of the gods rest on the stranger!" growled one of the savages, as he shifted himself to an easier position. "He has made the Abaragos things to laugh at. What will the squaws and young girls say when they see their men coming back without their prisoner? They will laugh and point their fingers at us and say that we are like old hounds who have lost their smell and cannot follow the trail and are only good to lie down by the fire and sleep."

"Matola speaks well," assented another of the braves. "It is shame that has this day been

brought upon the Abaragos. A stranger has come into their swamp and has yet escaped alive. It is many moons since such a thing has happened. Moltotak-Aya will be very angry when he hears."

"Perhaps the stranger does not live," put in another. "It may be that the alligators have torn him to pieces when he tried to cross the stream where the marks of his feet ended."

"No, that was a trick," declared another. "The stranger is cunning as the weasel. Saw you not how he tricked us when he made us lose time by running toward him on the island before he swung himself across the stream? The stranger is very wise and very brave. What man among the Abaragos would have laughed at the alligators and let go the vines while the alligators looked up at him with their mouths open?"

"It may be witchcraft," suggested another. "The stranger may know much magic and be able to cast a spell over his enemies."

The idea was uncomfortable and the members of the group shifted uneasily.

"It is dark," said one. "Let us light a fire to guide the feet of our brothers when they come back with the stranger."

The suggestion met with approval from the others and was carried at once into effect. Under

the cheering influence of the fire, their spirits seemed to revive.

But in proportion as theirs revived those of Bomba sank. The darkness at the moment was his best friend.

Perhaps an hour passed when Bomba heard the crackling of the brush as it was pushed aside by moving objects, and shortly a group of about a dozen men came into the zone of light cast by the fire.

They were angry and dispirited, and their leader, a stalwart brave towering over six feet in height, had a scowl of frightful malignity upon his dark face.

"Aloma has not brought the stranger with him," ventured one of those seated by the fire. "Has he fallen before Aloma's spear or arrow?"

"No," responded the leader, "the eyes of Aloma and his braves have not seen the stranger. He has melted into the mist or flown into the air. There were no tracks on the other side of the stream."

"Where are the other warriors of Aloma?" came a question.

"They make a circle around the swamp," was the reply. "They cannot follow where there are no tracks to lead. But they will wait as the puma waits, with their eyes wide open through the night, and if the stranger's feet are heard

or the stranger's form is seen, they will leap upon him as the puma springs. Aloma has come back to take you all to join your brothers in the watch. We must find the stranger and take him to the village. For if Moltotak-Aya learns that he has escaped, he will speak in thunder and his eyes will shoot lightning."

It was evident to Bomba that the Abaragos were in deadly awe of their chief.

"We will eat first," went on Aloma, "and then we will cross the stream and lie in wait."

The savages brought forth strips of cured meat from their pouches and devoured them hungrily.

Aloma lay leaning on his elbow, absorbed in gloomy reflections. His pride had been sorely hurt by his failure.

The fire had been allowed to burn down, but its flickering light shone dimly up against the foliage of the tree. Just enough for Aloma, as he cast his eyes carelessly upward, to distinguish something vague and bulging where Bomba crouched with the bag on his back.

He sprang to his feet and threw a heap of brushwood on the embers. The flames flared up.

Now Aloma no longer suspected. He knew.

"The stranger is in the tree!" he shouted.

The savages leaped to their feet. One of them drew his arrow to a head.

"Do not shoot!" cried Aloma. "He must be taken alive!"

The cry came too late. The arrow sung through the air.

It ridged Bomba's scalp. A fierce pain shot through his head. His brain reeled. He tried desperately to hold on to consciousness. Then blackness surged over him and he fell!

CHAPTER XX

IN DESPERATE CASE

How long it was before he came back to consciousness, Bomba did not know.

He opened his eyes to find himself surrounded by a ring of savages, whose faces expressed great joy as they surveyed their prisoner.

Bomba's head ached. The whole side of his face was covered with blood that had come from the scalp wound. He tried to put his hands to his head to ease the intolerable pain, and found that they were securely bound.

Then it came back to him, the clip of the arrow, the effort to hold on, the unavailing clutches he had made at the branches as he came tumbling down. He conjectured that he must have fallen on a heap of brushwood that had lessened the shock. He was sore and bruised all over, but it did not seem to him that any of his bones were broken.

As his eyes cleared they met those of Aloma.

"So," said the latter triumphantly, "the prey has not escaped the chase of the braves of the

Abaragos. It would have been well for the stranger if the arrow had pierced his heart. Now he shall die. But he will be a long time in dying, and the Abaragos will laugh as they watch him dance and listen to his death screams."

"Aloma is a coward," replied the lad calmly. "He mocks his prisoner because he is bound. Aloma would not dare to cut Bomba's bonds, put a knife in his hands and meet Bomba face to face. Bomba would shame Aloma before the faces of his braves."

Aloma's face became convulsed with rage, especially as he noted that his men looked at each other in unwilling admiration of the boy's challenge.

"Silence!" he shouted, kicking Bomba brutally. "Aloma would tear that tongue from your mouth, were it not that you must answer Moltotak-Aya when he questions you. Go, summon the warriors on the other side of the stream," he commanded one of his followers. "Tell them to hasten so that they may look upon the prisoner who thought that he could escape from the chase of the Abaragos."

The messenger hastened off, sending certain cries through the swamp that evidently signaled a recall. Answers were not long in coming, and in a little while the whole company had assembled.

They gathered about Bomba, gloating over his helplessness, heaping him with insults, striking him with their hands and feet, but, at the stern injunction of Aloma, refraining from serious injuries.

"He must be strong to endure the tortures that Moltotak-Aya will make him suffer," was the reason given for his interference. "Now let us go, so that the squaws and the girls and the old men of the tribe may feast their eyes on the stranger. There will be rejoicing to-night in the huts of the Abaragos."

Bomba was jerked roughly to his feet and placed in the center of the company. Two braves walked beside him with drawn knives, ready to plunge them into the body of the prisoner if he made the least effort to escape.

But escape was impossible. Bomba's hands were tightly bound behind him. His feet also were tied, but there was a slack of about three feet between his ankles so that he could keep pace with his captors.

Torches held by those in front afforded sufficient light for the party to thread its way among the mazes of the swamp, and in a little while the savages reached the place where they had left their canoes.

Bomba was thrown into one of these and the

flotilla rapidly paddled around the island where Bomba had found the red flowers.

"To what advantage had he found them?" the boy asked himself, as he lay listening to the splash of the paddles. What had they brought him but torture and death? He was in the grip of hideous savages, among the cruelest of the jungle. His chances of rescue in that awful swamp were so slight as not to be worth considering. Now Casson would never get well. He would die of grief when he learned of Bomba's fate. And Bomba would go to his death—and such a death—without ever having had the answer to his questions about his parents.

He felt the bag containing the flowers. They had not been taken from him. His bow, too, was still slung over his shoulders, his quiver of arrows was at his side and his machete still reclined in its sheath. He wondered why they had not been taken from him. Helpless as he was to use them, they brought him a marked sense of comfort, a resurgence of hope.

The canoes circled the island and were drawn up in the sedge grass along the shore of the swamp. Bomba was dragged on shore, and again the party took up its march. But certain of the more fleet-footed were detailed to run ahead and apprise the village of their coming.

So that when the horde emerged from the

swamp into an extensive clearing on more solid ground in which a hundred or more huts were stragglingly located, Bomba found himself in a swirling mass of practically all the population of the place. Young and old of both sexes leaped and danced about him, striking and kicking him, taunting and mocking him, while the clash of cymbals and the beating of tom-toms betokened their savage glee.

One squaw made as though she would tear from him the bag containing the mysterious plants, but she was grasped and hurled aside by Aloma.

"Cease, daughter of evil," he commanded. "Have you forgotten that it is death for any but Moltotak-Aya to take aught from the body of a prisoner?"

The squaw slunk whimperingly into the crowd. Now Bomba knew why his possessions had remained untouched. All loot must first pass through the hands of the chief.

Aloma gave plenty of time for the populace to enjoy themselves at the prisoner's expense. Then, with half a dozen of his warriors, he took the lad to a rude compound near the water on which stood a solitary hut.

Into this Aloma thrust the lad so violently that he fell to the floor. Then the leader, who, from the deference paid him, seemed to be next

in authority to the chief, stationed two husky warriors at the door of the hut.

"On your heads be it, Matuxa and Salura," Aloma reminded them sternly, "to see that the prisoner does not escape. If you fail in your watchfulness, Moltotak-Aya will feed you to the sacred alligators. Let not sleep dim your eyes or relax your hold on your spears, or it would have been better for you if you had not been born. Be warned. Aloma has spoken."

The guards inclined their heads in submission. They seated themselves, one on each side of the door of the hut. Aloma cast a malignant glance at the prisoner and went away.

Bomba sat in the dense gloom that was only relieved by the dim light that filtered through the doorway. He expected momentarily to receive a visit from Moltotak-Aya or to be dragged into the presence of that potentate. He wondered why he had not seen him in the tumultuous scene of a little while before. He conjectured that perhaps the haughty chief disdained to mingle with the crowd and maintained his prestige by holding aloof. But that he would see him soon he felt assured.

A little while later, when a dark figure loomed in the doorway, Bomba thought that his interview with the chief was at hand. But when a voice spoke he knew that it was that of Aloma.

"Moltotak-Aya is not here," began Aloma, squatting down a few feet away from Bomba. "He has gone on a hunt with many of his warriors. He did not know that strangers had come to the land of the Abaragos, or he would have stayed to fight with them."

"Bomba is sorry that Moltotak-Aya is not here," replied the lad. "Bomba would talk with the great chief. He would not speak with a forked tongue. He would tell him that he came to the land of the Abaragos with peace in his heart and with no thought of evil to the Abarago people. He came only to get some flowers that make sick people well. Moltotak-Aya would understand and would bid the stranger go in peace."

An evil smile came into the face of Aloma.

"That is foolish talk," he replied. "The stranger does not know Moltotak-Aya. No stranger that comes to the land of the Abaragos ever goes back alive."

"Aloma does not speak well," returned the lad. "He says words that are not pleasing to the gods."

"The Abaragos' gods delight in the death of their enemies," was the reply in which Aloma summed up his theology. "But we waste time in foolish talk. Where are the friends of the stranger and how many of them have come with the stranger to the land of the Abaragos?"

"There was only one with Bomba in the Swamp of Death," answered the lad truthfully.

"Aloma knows that," was the impatient reply. "He saw him waving to the stranger when he was making the rope of vines. But on the other side of the Swamp of Death there may be many friends of the stranger. He would not come alone into the land of the Abaragos."

Bomba remained mute.

"Did the stranger hear the question of Aloma?" asked the Abarago with an ominous note in his voice.

"Bomba heard," replied the lad calmly, "but he does not choose to answer."

"There are many ways of making the stranger speak," declared Aloma angrily. "If one finger is cut off at a time, if strips of flesh are torn from his body, if a hot iron is thrust into the eye, the man speaks."

"Do not make Bomba laugh," was the reply. "Aloma can do what he will and Bomba will not speak. Bomba does not fear Aloma. He has already dared Aloma to fight him with knives, but Aloma was afraid. Aloma has the heart of a squaw."

The native drew his knife from his belt as though to drive it into his captive's heart. But a salutary fear of the wrath of Moltotak-Aya restrained him.

"Aloma has seen many men die," he said, as he reluctantly returned his knife to his belt. "None has died so fearful a death as the stranger shall die."

"Let Aloma keep his brave words to frighten children with," replied the jungle lad. "Bomba is weary. Bomba would sleep."

Again that dark hand reached for the knife and again it halted on the haft of the weapon. Aloma sprang to his feet as though to leave. He turned, however, for one more question.

"A brave of the Abaragos is missing," he said. "Notamba, a nephew of the chief. Moltotak-Aya's heart will be sore when he learns that he is gone. Has the stranger seen aught of Notamba?"

A nephew of the chief! Dear, as Aloma's words implied, to Moltotak-Aya's heart! Bomba's pulses quickened. Might not this be something to bargain with?

"Yes," he replied, "Bomba has seen Notamba."

CHAPTER XXI

THE POISON SCENT

ALOMA, at Bomba's words, was on the alert instantly.

"The stranger has seen Notamba?" he inquired eagerly. "When did he see him and where?"

"Bomba found him crawling in the grass," replied the lad. "Bomba leaped upon him and fought with him. Notamba was brave, but he was not as strong as Bomba. Bomba choked him till the light went out of his eyes."

"It is a lie!" cried Aloma angrily. "The stranger is but a boy and Notamba was the mightiest of the Abarago braves. He could have broken the boy in half as Aloma would snap a twig. The stranger could not conquer Notamba."

"Yet Bomba speaks truth," was the reply.

"Then if the stranger has killed Notamba, Moltotak-Aya will make the stranger take three days in dying," declared Aloma. "He will lose his sleep in thinking of ways to make the stranger scream louder."

"Bomba did not kill Notamba," replied the

jungle boy. "He fought with him and choked him, but did not kill him. He made him prisoner and tied his hands."

"Where is Notamba now?" queried Aloma.

"In a place that Bomba knows," replied the lad. "He is well and has good food. No harm has come to him and no harm will come to him—if the heart of Moltotak-Ava has no harm in it for Bomba."

He let that sink in. Aloma stood for a long time in deep reflection. The thought of exchanging Bomba for Notamba was a bitter one for him. The lad's defiance had stung him to the core and he was looking forward gleefully to seeing him tortured. Still, Notamba was very dear to the heart of Moltotak-Aya. And what Moltotak-Aya wished was law to all his people.

"Aloma will think of what the stranger has said," he stated dourly and left the hut.

The possibility that he held the whip hand brought a gleam of hope to Bomba. Still, he did not count too much upon it. His story might be absolutely disbelieved by the savage potentate. It might be looked upon simply as a cunning ruse to gain time. Or, even if it were believed, the chief might send out his warriors to search for the camp of the strangers and attempt to release Notamba by force of arms, in the meantime holding Bomba captive. No, Bomba must not rely

too much upon that. He must plan to escape without any reference to Notamba.

But now he must sleep. He must keep himself in the best physical condition possible in order to take advantage of any opening that fate might offer. The day perhaps would bring counsel.

So he stretched his aching body on the earth floor of the squalid hut and lapsed into the sleep of utter exhaustion.

He woke in the morning, greatly refreshed. The pain in his head had abated and resiliency had come back again into his limbs. In the cheerful sunlight outside, some rays of which came into the gloomy hut, he felt new energy and resolution.

Food was brought to him, surprisingly good in quality and quantity, considering the resources of the Abaragos. But Bomba did not lay the flattering unction to his heart that this was prompted by some sudden burst of generosity on the part of his captors. He must be kept well fed and strong so as longer to endure the torture in store for him.

Bomba was versed in most of the dialects of the jungle and that of the Abaragos differed so slightly from the others that he had little difficulty in understanding what was said and being understood in turn.

The guards talked with each other freely in his

presence. What did it matter what the captive heard? He would never repeat it. He was foredoomed to certain death.

So Bomba learned from their conversation that Moltotak-Aya had not returned during the night and that the belief was rife that he would not return until the following day. This was good news. He had all day to formulate his plans of escape and one more full night probably to execute them. For it was on the night that he would have to depend. In that swarming village he could not make a move in the daylight that would not be discovered instantly.

One thing that strongly piqued Bomba's curiosity had been revealed by the daylight. That was that the back of the hut was open as well as the front. Nor did it seem to be guarded.

At the front the guards carried out their watch with unremitting vigilance. Evidently their fear of the wrath of Moltotak-Aya kept them strictly up to the mark.

But why, with all this precaution at the front, had the rear of the hut remained neglected? It seemed to lead straight into the open. What would hinder the prisoner, if he could free his hands and legs, from making there his dash for liberty?

Bomba did not know, but he determined to find out if possible. So, gradually, inch by inch, he

wormed himself across the floor in that direction.

He did this casually and apparently without attracting the notice of the guards. They glanced at him indifferently from time to time, but made no comment, gave no order. This struck Bomba as rather strange. But he was not one to look a gift horse in the mouth, and he kept on with a stirring of hope that something tugging at him inside told him was absurd.

He reached the open space at the edge of the hut and looked about. The stirring of hope died out! He knew now why the guards had been so strangely indifferent to his movements!

The rear edge of the hut was on the brink of a lagoon. In that lagoon was a swarm of alligators twenty or more in number swimming lazily about!

Some of them looked up as Bomba's head protruded over the edge, their wicked eyes alight at the suggestion of a possible feast. On their backs were the rude symbols which showed their sacred character. The gods of the Abaragos!

Bomba's heart sickened. No wonder that the rear of the hut had been left unwatched. These guards were quite sufficient.

He turned to find the grinning faces of the sentries confronting him. As their eyes met his, the savages burst into raucous laughter.

"The stranger wondered why we let him go to the rear of the hut," chuckled one. "Now the stranger knows."

Bomba made no reply. His eyes looked disdainfully through the guards as though he did not know they were present.

"The stranger does not like the alligators," gurgled the other guard. "Yet they like the stranger. They would be glad if he came down among them."

"They would eat him raw," replied the one who had first spoken. "It is better that he should be cooked first. The flesh of his bones will smell sweet when they are boiled in the kettles of the Abaragos. There will be great feasting when the stranger dies."

A stab went through Bomba's heart. He remembered now that Ashati had once told him that the Abaragos, besides being one of the cruelest tribes in the jungle, were reputed to be cannibals. This conversation served to confirm the rumor.

He knew now what certain things implied that he had noted rather curiously hanging from the roof of the hut. He had thought at first that they were cured meats of animals captured in the chase. Now, as he looked at them more closely, he could see a sinister resemblance to human arms and legs. It was only the presence of his foes,

looking at him gloatingly, that enabled him to repress a shudder.

Now his determination to escape was redoubled. But how could he escape? Tied hands and legs! Watched by vigilant guards! He could do much, but he could not do the impossible.

All through that morning and until mid-afternoon he cudgeled his tortured brain to find a solution for his terrible problem. Terrible as it was, he never for a moment relinquished it.

A strange languor was stealing over him. Yet he had slept soundly the night before despite his misery. Why should he be so drowsy now?

He shook himself and cleared the cobwebs from his brain. His hand came in contact with the bag of flowers that he had shaken from his shoulders and that now lay beside him on the floor.

Then his brain began to work like lightning.

It was the odor stealing from them that was tending to stupefy him. Why should it not, if adroitly managed, stupefy others?

"The flowers of death," they had been called. Might they not prove to be for him the flowers of life?

CHAPTER XXII

A DASH FOR FREEDOM

WHEN Bomba had plucked the red flowers on the island, he had been mindful of Dr. Yarrow's injunction that they must be kept wet. As long as they were in that condition, the scientist had stated, their poisonous and drugging qualities were held in abeyance. It was only as they became dry that the pungent odor arose that stupefied the brain and, if long enough continued, caused death.

So Bomba had drenched them thoroughly before stowing them away in his bag, and in his subsequent flight through the swamp the bag had been splashed time and again with water.

Now the oppressive heat of the hut had had its effect and they were rapidly drying out, and with the drying had come that pungent odor exuding through the pores of the bag.

As far as he could, from the rays that stole through the doorway, Bomba tried to calculate the position of the sun. He estimated that there would be three full hours before darkness set in. With the darkness would come the changing of

the guards for the night. He must await the new guards before making his attempt.

In one way the delay was grateful. The plants would grow drier and drier and the drugging odor would be that much stronger.

In another way the delay was fraught with danger. At any moment in that three hours he might hear the shouts of welcome that hailed the return of Moltotak-Aya, and with the coming of that dusky potentate all of Bomba's newly contrived plan would go astray.

Again he sought the rear of the hut with its grisly guardians, and again the human watchers in front regarded him mockingly. Still, Bomba stayed there, regardless of their grins. What he wanted was the fresh air, to keep at the greatest possible distance from that sleep-compelling bag.

Night came at last without any sign of the arrival of Moltotak-Aya. That danger, at least, had grown less menacing.

A bountiful supper was brought to Bomba, of which he ate every morsel. He did not know how long it would be before he would have a chance to eat again.

The guards were changed as usual, with repeated warnings by Aloma to keep strict watch.

He waited until utter blackness settled down

on the village. In the interior of the hut it was so black that he could not see his hand before his face. In the door of the hut the figures of the guards were merely deeper blurs against the darkness.

Then, noiselessly, Bomba unfastened the string that bound the neck of the bag. Gradually he pushed the bag across the floor until it was only a foot or two in the rear of the sentries.

Then he waited, his heart beating tumultuously, every nerve on the alert.

For what seemed an endless time, nothing happened. The outer air mixed with the odor that was coming from the bag and diluted it, making it the less noticeable. Bomba had foreseen that and welcomed it. Had it been too pungent in assailing the nostrils of the sentries, suspicion might have been aroused and the plot discovered.

The guards were indulging in desultory talk regarding unimportant matters of the tribe. For a time this was more or less animated. Then it gradually tapered off and finally was reduced almost to monosyllables.

At last Bomba noticed that a drowsy question from one elicited no response at all from the other and that the failure to answer did not lead to a repetition of the question.

The drug was beginning to work!

Bomba waited with his heart in his mouth. At

any instant an interruption might come. Aloma might appear.

The minutes passed like hours. Then, in the dimness, Bomba saw the figure of one of the guards sag down. The fellow's head sank on his breast and he began the heavy snoring of one under the influence of a drug.

A moment later another snore came from the other side of the door.

For five minutes Bomba waited, to make assurance doubly sure. Then, silently as a cat, he approached the door of the hut.

He bent down and with his teeth drew the knife of one of the guards from its sheath.

He retreated to the interior of the hut and, with the knife still between his teeth, sawed away at the bonds that held his hands until they yielded.

With his hands free, it was the work of only a moment to cut the rope that fettered his ankles.

He stretched himself with great delight and vigorously chafed his limbs until the blood flowed freely through them.

Then he made ready for his perilous adventure.

What to do with the guards was a problem. He could have knifed them with ease. That would have been the safest way, the way Lodo would have taken, that Aloma would have taken, that practically everybody in the jungle would have taken under the circumstances. But that was

not Bomba's way. He could not knife a sleeping man.

On the other hand, if he took away his bag of flowers the influence of the drug might soon be dissipated and the guards awake to give the alarm.

He compromised by taking one of the precious flowers from the bag and laying it between the two sleepers, where its influence would be close and strong. He abandoned it with reluctance, but there was no alternative. After all, he had four left, and Dr. Yarrow had assured him that three would be enough.

He then dipped the bag in the lagoon to wet the plants remaining to him, pulled tight the string that closed the neck, and slung the bag over his shoulder. Then, assuring himself that his weapons were in their places, he crept on hands and knees through the doorway, so close to the drugged guards that he brushed them in passing. But they did not stir. The red flowers had done their work well.

He paused when he reached the ground outside and flattened himself close to the earth, while his keen eyes swept all parts of the village.

He saw nothing to cause him alarm. The moon would rise later, but at present the huts were shrouded in gloom, except for the dim light of a torch here and there. Now and then the bark of a dog broke the stillness, the laugh of a girl, the

deeper note of a man. Outside of these, nothing, except the monotonous hum of insects.

There was evidently no special thought being given to the prisoner. He, it was assumed, was safe enough, tied hand and foot and under the supervision of two husky warriors. What interest there was in the village doubtless centered on the approaching return of Moltotak-Aya and his braves.

Bomba thanked the fates that the compound was situated on the border of the village instead of in the center. There were some huts, however, that he would have to pass, and it was there that danger lay.

His chief fear was of the dogs. His own craft could baffle the cunning of the natives. But he could not prevent his scent from betraying itself to a dog, and if the creature should give tongue, there would be commotion on the instant.

He crept along the ground until he reached the shelter of the trees and brush that bordered the edge of the village. Then he rose to his feet and flitted like a shadow from tree to tree.

Three separate times his path led him past scattered native huts. But in each case he worked his way to the rear and passed safely. His ears caught occasional grunts and monosyllables from the interiors. In one of the huts a brave was beating his wife. Bomba did not interfere.

All through that nightmare journey Bomba's ears were on the alert for any sound that might tell him his flight had been discovered. But the same general stillness reigned. His heart began to beat high with hope. Give him another hour and he would ask no odds of his enemies.

At last he had reached the confines of the jungle village. No other hut was visible. He slipped into the thick jungle and for the first time since he had left his prison took a long breath.

He looked up at the stars, which were beginning to peep out of the sky, and took his bearings. He knew how implicitly he could rely on these guardians of the night. He knew that in general he must bear to the east and a little to the north to reach the camp of the white men.

Terrible dangers lay before him. But certain death lay behind him. He did not hesitate. He tightened his belt and prepared to plunge into the Swamp of Death.

A fearful din arose. Shouts of alarm and rage were blended with the beating of tom-toms. Lights sprang up like magic in the huts of the village.

His escape had been discovered!

CHAPTER XXIII

A RACE FOR LIFE

BOMBA darted off with every nerve tingling, every muscle working, all his resolution keyed to the highest pitch.

As he ran he conjectured what might have happened. Some one, Aloma probably, had gone to the prison hut, discovered the guards drugged, the captive gone, and had raised the hue and cry. And now they would pursue him with far more tenacity and ferocity than they had in the first chase because of their fear of the wrath of Molto-tak-Aya, he whose mouth spoke thunder and whose eyes flashed lightning.

No doubt the scouts who had gone after the chief had told him of the prisoner they held and the dusky chief was returning, metaphorically licking his chops at the feast that awaited him. His rage would be terrible.

Bomba drew what scant comfort he could from the knowledge that it would be some time before his enemies would find out the direction he had taken. They would run hither and thither with

torches until they finally settled on the spot where he had entered the swamp.

But find it they would, and then with their superior knowledge of the swamp they would soon make up for lost time and draw ever closer upon the fugitive's heels.

In the swamp they could track him. On the water they might be at fault, if he could get a long enough start.

Bomba's sense of direction had been developed to such a point that it was almost as keen as that of the animals of the jungle. He paused for a moment to decide just the route he would have to travel to reach the canoes that had brought him to the village the day before.

In a moment he had determined his course and made for it unerringly.

Owing to its proximity to the village, there were some beaten trails in this part of the swamp and Bomba chose and followed one of these directly to the bank.

But there was no canoe in sight and Bomba beat the sedge grass of the banks for several precious minutes before he found one.

He glanced back in the direction of the village. The torches now were no longer scattered, as they had been at first, but were moving in a close procession. The savages were coming in a body. They had found his trail!

He dipped the paddle into the water and the canoe shot out into the stream. Under the impact of his skilled and powerful arms, it whizzed along the surface like a meteor.

His hope was that he might get so far away before his pursuers reached the bank that the night would shroud him. In that case, although of course the fact that a canoe was missing would soon be discovered, they would not know whether he had gone up or downstream. They would send some of their men in each direction, but that would divide their forces and render so much better his chances of escape.

Out of the forest the Abaragos burst upon the bank, waving their torches and shouting shrill threats of torture and death.

The torches threw a flood of light over the stream, but Bomba saw that he was beyond the zone of illumination. They could not see him.

But his relief was of short duration. He had reckoned without the native cunning.

Two blazing torches, hurled by brawny arms, rose high in the air, one downstream and the other up. They described an arc through the air, lighting it brilliantly in both directions. In the flare of the one thrown in the upstream direction Bomba was clearly revealed paddling for his life.

A yell of savage triumph ensued, the Abaragos

tumbled into their canoes and in a moment were in pursuit.

Six men were paddling in each and the boats rushed along at a speed that no lone paddler could hope to equal.

It was certain that long before Bomba could reach that spot on the shore where he had last seen Gibo—the goal that he had fixed for himself when he had embarked—his enemies would be upon him.

His case seemed hopeless. Still, he did not give up. Despair was foreign to his nature.

He must try to find some outlet from the main stream, some creek or bayou or lagoon into which he could dart and hide while his pursuers shot past, unseeing.

But this seemed impossible, for at the bow of each canoe stood a native with a flaring torch that lighted up the stream ahead and kept the boy in view.

The foremost of the enemy canoes was now not more than a hundred yards away.

Bomba drew in his paddle, unslung his bow and fitted an arrow to the string.

The arrow sang through the air and transfixed the arm of the native in the bow of the canoe.

There was a wild howl, the savage tumbled back upon his mates, throwing them into confusion,

the torch dropped sizzling into the water and the boat was shrouded in darkness.

Its progress stopped. In a flash Bomba resumed his paddle and shot away.

He could have shot the native through the body had he been so inclined. But he never killed an enemy when disabling would do as well. To shoot him in the arm that held the torch served the same purpose as though the arrow had pierced the heart.

On Bomba went at dizzy speed, his eyes searching either bank to discover the coveted hiding place.

But none revealed itself. Now the second boat had passed the first and was coming on with tremendous speed, another savage holding aloft the torch as his comrade in the other boat had done. Either they had not sensed what had happened to extinguish the first torch, or if they had, had concluded it was a lucky shot. Such marvelous marksmanship could not repeat itself.

They recognized their error when the second torchbearer met the same fate as the first. Again the crew was thrown into panic and the rowing temporarily stopped.

There were three other boats in the flotilla and suddenly all the lighted torches were extinguished as by common consent. The Abaragos had learned their lesson. They would take no further

chances of offering a target to such a marksman. They would pursue their prey in darkness, since there was no other way. What mattered it, anyway? He was surely in their toils. A few minutes more and they would be carrying him back in triumph to Moltotak-Aya, there to be done to death amid tortures that beggared description.

Hugging the farther bank and searching it with eyes that had learned to see in the dark, Bomba descried a little inlet bearing to the right and thickly screened with trees and bushes.

Three strokes of his paddle carried him into its friendly shelter. He crouched low in the canoe, waiting.

A few moments later the canoes of the savages swept past, their inmates yelling like fiends!

CHAPTER XXIV

HORRIBLE JAWS

BOMBA breathed more freely. The chase had been fierce, but the stag had thrown the hounds off his track.

But for how long? Those hounds were thirsting for blood. They would not be cheated of their prey.

Bomba knew that he had but a little respite. In five minutes at the most the Abaragos would realize that, since they had not overtaken the fugitive on whom they were gaining hand over hand, he must have left the main course of the stream and sought refuge in some such place as that where he was now lying.

This would take time, of course, for they might follow many false clues before they struck the right one. But strike it they would at last, and then be after him in full cry.

Now the moon was rising. Bomba did not know whether to be thankful for this or not. On the one hand, it would show him better where he was going and help him to avoid quagmires and

other traps of the treacherous swamp. On the other hand, it would enable his foes better to detect his movements.

But since he could neither help nor hinder the phases of the moon, he dismissed it from his mind and bent every effort to making the best of things as they were.

One thing was certain. He must not return to the main stream. He must follow this estuary as far as it would permit him and then take to the swamp on foot.

He bent again to his paddle and made his way up the little inlet. In places it was twenty or more feet wide. In others it narrowed until Bomba could have touched from midstream either bank with his paddle.

It was slow and tortuous progress, for the weeds reached up nearly to the surface of the water, and it was all that Bomba could do to force his craft through the clutching tendrils.

At last it came to a stop in a mass of tangled sedge grass. He had reached the limit of his water journey.

He stepped out on the shore and with one deft stroke drove the paddle through the bottom of the canoe. He watched it fill with water and sink. There would be one less clew to betray to his enemies the course he had taken.

Then he hid the paddle in the deep brush, took

a look at the stars, and laid his course east by north.

In the distance he could hear the shouts of his enemies. From the increasing distinctness of the sounds he knew that they had realized the trick he had played upon them and were returning to search the banks of the main stream.

He hurried on through that horrid maze of mud and water, straining his eyes to see where he was planting his steps. The dread of quagmire was ever present with him.

Roots reached out to trip him up, hanging vines caught him by the throat as with ghostly fingers, mud gripped his feet as though urging him to tarry.

In places where the trees thinned a little the moonlight shone through and helped him speed his progress. But there were other places, and these far the more numerous, where it was so black that he could not see six inches ahead of him.

In one of these latter spots as he put his foot forward he felt only empty air. He drew back hurriedly, but as he did so his other foot slipped in the slime and he found himself plunging through space!

He fell like a plummet into a deep lagoon and the water closed over his head.

He rose spluttering, gasping, and shook the

water from his eyes. His first impulse was to regain the bank from which he had fallen. But from the time it had taken him to strike the water he knew that the bank must be at least ten feet high. There was no likelihood that he could climb it.

He tried it, however, and found it slippery with slime, with no shrub or projection to give him a hold. There was no help for it. He must try to swim to the farther shore.

How far away that was he had no way of knowing, but he struck out for it with all the power of his muscular arms.

Then he heard queer noises, grunts as of something suddenly aroused from sleep, splashes as of heavy bodies rising to the surface.

His blood froze in his veins. He knew only too well what those sinister noises portended.

He had fallen into a lagoon swarming with alligators, the sacred alligators of the Abaragos!

No need now for his human enemies to beat the swamp for him. The alligators would do their work for them.

A rift of moonlight broke through the trees that surrounded the lagoon and revealed to the anxious lad two monstrous brutes converging toward him. From the grunts and snorts he heard in other directions, he knew that equally fearful enemies were bearing down upon him.

He could not use his weapons. He might drive his knife into the jaws of one of them. But to what use? Before he could withdraw it he would be torn to bits by the others.

He felt that he was doomed. Still the instinct of self-preservation kept him going. His arms were working like piston rods. But the alligators were swifter than he.

His arm came in contact with something hard, something heavy that barred his way. At first he thought it was the body of one of his scaly foes.

Then he saw that it was a log, covered with fungus. Beyond this were other logs lying closely together.

A raft! A heavy native raft of logs bound together with stout withes, an abandoned raft that had made its way sluggishly into those murky waters.

Like lightning Bomba's hands clutched the edge of the raft and he swung his body upon it just as a pair of jaws closed behind him with a grinding snap.

Bomba scrambled to the center of the raft and sprawled out on it, panting.

But he lay there only for a moment. He had escaped temporarily, but his life still hung by a thread. For now the waters were fairly alive with the ravenous brutes. They circled about the

raft, grunting and bellowing, their tails beating the water into foam.

Some of them tore with their jaws at the raft, trying to pull the logs apart. Others swam under it and came up against it with a tremendous thump, seeking to overturn it.

As Bomba sprang to his feet he nearly tripped over some heavy object. He looked down and saw that it was a stout paddle that had been used for propelling the rude craft. It was more like a sweep than a paddle and the handle was as thick as his arm.

He grasped it just as one of the alligators threw its body halfway upon the raft and reached for him.

Raising the heavy sweep, Bomba drove it with all his force into the open mouth and deep into the cavernous throat.

The brute gave vent to a tremendous bellow of rage and pain and slid back off the raft into the water, which it churned into foam with its flounderings.

But the attack, successful as it was, had robbed Bomba of his weapon. It had broken off short in the reptile's throat and only a fragment of the shaft remained in the lad's hand.

He dropped it and reached for his bow.

Twang! An arrow sped through the eye of one of the alligators into the brain.

A second arrow disposed of another of Bomba's foes. Their comrades fell upon the writhing bodies and tore them into bits, thus affording the lad a brief respite.

Only brief, however, for the alligators seemed to be legion. And Bomba's stock of arrows was getting low. They would soon be gone and then the end would be only a matter of time. The alligators would upset the raft or throw themselves upon it from different sides at the same time, and some pair of those fearful jaws would close upon him.

A sigh of wind came over the lagoon and something brushed Bomba's face.

He looked up and saw an overhanging bough of a tree that the gust of wind had brought within his reach.

He leaped and caught it before it rose again. A horrid snout brushed his sandals as he swung himself desperately up on the branch.

With breath that came in sobs from his straining lungs, Bomba clung there, scarcely daring to believe that he had escaped the ravenous foes that swam beneath him, looking up with wicked disappointed eyes.

When he had somewhat recovered, he made his way to the trunk of the tree and was preparing to descend to the solid earth when a chorus of yells

came on the wind and in the distance he could catch faint glimmers of torches.

For a moment he was tempted to remain in the tree, sheltered by the thick foliage. But only for a moment. It would never do to let his enemies get ahead of him. Then he would be ringed in, to be hunted down at leisure.

He must go on—on till his breath failed him, on as long as a spark of life remained in him, on and ever on.

He slid down the tree and resumed his flight, doubling and twisting, tripping and slipping, at times increasing the distance between him and his pursuers, again hearing the shouts and seeing the torches closer.

The chase endured for hours. Bomba's eyes were dimming, his head reeling.

CHAPTER XXV

WINNING THROUGH

'A SHOT rang through the jungle.

At the sound of the shot Bomba's heart seemed to leap from his body.

Then came another and another. The white men's rifles! They were firing as a signal to guide him to them.

Bomba's mortal weariness dropped from him as a garment. Like a greyhound he darted in the direction of the shots.

Through brush and vines he broke, and burst into an open space where the white men and Lodo and his bucks were gathered in close array.

There were shouts of delight as their eyes fell on the pallid, mud-covered figure of the jungle boy, and the next moment he was hugged tight in the arms of Dr. Yarrow and Leeds and Richardson while the bucks crowded around him, pawing him jubilantly, and the faithful Gibo threw his arms about the boy's neck, blubbering like a baby.

Smilingly, Bomba extricated himself from the embraces of his friends.

"We will talk later," he cried. "The Abaragos are coming. Listen to their shouts. See the waving of their torches. We must fight."

Instantly he assumed command.

"Let the white men sink down on the ground with their fire sticks," he directed. "Let Lodo and his bucks get behind trees with their spears ready. When the Abaragos come, let the white men fire. But let them fire low, for it is best to wound and not to kill. It is in the mind of Bomba that the Abaragos will be frightened at the fire sticks. They will think the white men are gods and their blood will be turned to water. If they keep coming on, the white men will fire once more. But let not Lodo and his bucks use their spears until Bomba tells them."

They did as commanded and absolute silence brooded over the array.

Bomba alone stood out fully revealed. His head was drooping and his figure expressed abject despondency, as though he had given up the struggle and was only waiting to be captured.

"Better take shelter, Bomba," muttered Dr. Yarrow in a low tone. "A spear or an arrow may get you."

"No," returned the lad. "They want to capture, not kill me—yet."

The torches came closer. Savage faces peered beneath them, and those faces lighted with

demoniac triumph when the Abaragos caught sight of Bomba. With fearful yells they rushed forward to seize him.

"Now!" shouted Bomba, as he leaped aside.

Flame and thunder broke from the white men's rifles and the foremost savages went down.

The yells of triumph changed into those of terror as the Abaragos fell back in utter fright. Spears and arrows they knew and would fight against. But what were these terrible things that spoke with tongues of fire?

But one tall figure sprang into the wavering ranks and spurred them on to another charge.

Again the rifles spoke, and this time the leader, whom Bomba recognized as Aloma, stumbled and fell with several of his men. It was too much. The Abaragos broke and fled in utter panic. How could they fight against gods? They sped through the jungle with yells of fear that swelled ever louder in volume until they died away in the distance.

Dr. Yarrow and the other white men rose to their feet.

"Your strategy worked, boy," observed Dr. Yarrow. "Now let's look after these fellows."

Torches were lighted and they searched in the bushes for the bodies of their enemies. They found five wounded, but none dead, thanks to the humane direction of the jungle boy to shoot low.

That others had been slightly wounded, but not enough to prevent them following their comrades in flight, was shown by trails of blood on the bushes.

"Just what are we going to do with these fellows?" asked Dr. Yarrow perplexedly, after the bandaging was completed and the wounded were made as comfortable as possible. "We don't want to take them along with us, I suppose, as prisoners. And we can't take them to their own village."

Bomba had a solution. He addressed himself to Aloma, who glared at him defiantly.

"Aloma would have tortured Bomba," said the jungle boy. "He would have laughed if he could have heard Bomba scream. But Bomba's heart has no evil in it towards Aloma and his people. This will Bomba do. He will loose the bonds of Notamba, who is a prisoner in Bomba's camp, and send him to Aloma. Then Notamba and Aloma can have talk and Notamba can go to his people and get help to carry Aloma and his brothers to the village of Moltotak-Aya. Bomba has spoken."

The defiant glare in Aloma's eyes vanished. His savage heart could not understand, but it could be touched by a magnanimity hitherto unknown in the jungle.

It was nearly daybreak now, and the party, led by Gibo, made their way out of the Swamp of Death and turned their backs on it, as they hoped,

forever. Bomba lost no time on reaching camp in releasing Notamba from the custody of those who had been left to guard him and sending him to his wounded comrades.

"The heart of Bomba is a good heart," was the native's tribute, as he set out on his mission. "Notamba would be at peace with Bomba forever."

On the way back to camp Dr. Yarrow had explained things yet dark to Bomba.

"Gibo found us," said Dr. Yarrow, "and we got on the way at once. I don't know how many miles we traveled in that awful swamp, going largely by guesswork, but always going. At times we'd fire a shot as a signal, but it was only the last ones that reached you. We'd almost given up hope when you ran up to us."

"Gibo is a good friend," said Bomba, patting the shoulder of the Indian, who grinned with delight. "Bomba will never forget what Gibo has done for him."

In return, Bomba narrated his experiences amid gasps of astonishment and admiration from his auditors.

"Gibo was right when he said there was none like Bomba in all the jungle!" exclaimed Dr. Yarrow.

"He might have said in all the world," de-

clared Richardson, and Leeds nodded in confirmation.

"And I have brought the flowers," said Bomba joyfully, opening the precious bag. "The red, star-shaped flowers that will heal the sick mind of Casson."

"The very things I wanted!" exclaimed Dr. Yarrow as he examined them. "By Jove, they're splendid specimens. Let's hope they'll do all we expect of them."

The march homeward was begun at once. Bomba did not look for any further attacks by the Abaragos. The white men's fire sticks were not to their liking, and even if they had resolved to dare these, Bomba felt convinced that the influence of Notamba and Aloma would dissuade Moltotak-Aya from the attempt. Still, special guard was kept until they were several days' march away from their territory.

The welcome they received at the maloca of Hondura was tumultuous and joyful, the more so as the chief and most of his people had never expected to see the adventurers return from the ill-famed Swamp of Death. Pirah was excited and joyous as she clasped Bomba's hand and Hondura gave a great feast to celebrate his return.

Sobrinini was still as frenzied and hag-like as before. Casson, dear old Casson, had grown noticeably stronger under the influence of the medi-

cines left by Dr. Yarrow, and his joy at seeing Bomba again was beyond all words.

Dr. Yarrow and his companions set to work at once distilling from the red flowers a thin, colorless substance that, to Bomba's amazement, was as white as crystal.

Properly diluted, it was administered to Casson, and almost immediately improvement was visible. Bomba had hoped it would cure the old man instantly, but Dr. Yarrow warned him that he must be patient.

"It may be weeks or months, but it will come," he said.

"Fully come?" asked the jungle boy eagerly. "So that Casson can tell Bomba all that he wants to know about his father and his mother?"

Dr. Yarrow considered for a moment. Then he answered solemnly:

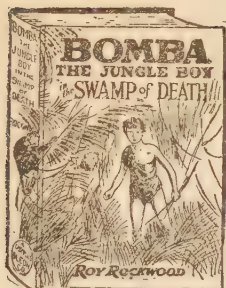
"It will come. The door of Casson's mind is locked. But we have found a key for the lock. The key is turning in the lock. The door will soon creak and come ajar. Then it will swing wide open. Then shall Bomba know all that his heart longs to know."

THE END

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